The World's Leading Mystery Magazine

ELLERY QUEEN'S Mystery Magazine

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A NEW STORY BY
STANLEY ELLIN

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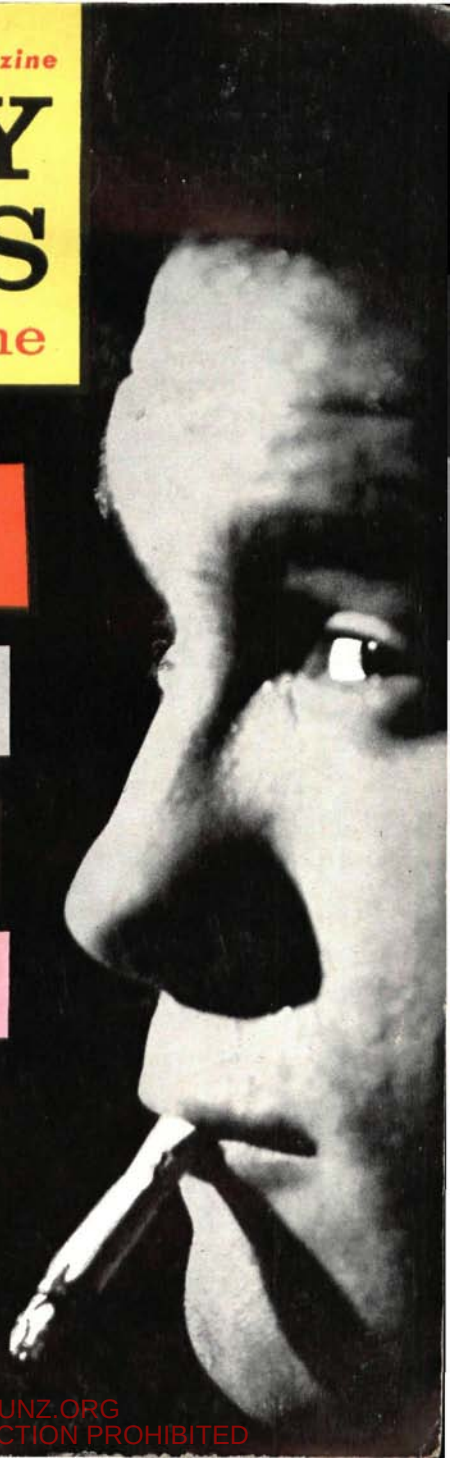

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The World's Leading Mystery Magazine

ELLERY QUEEN'S
Mystery Magazine

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Printed in 7 editions — American, Australian, English, French, Italian, Japanese, & Portuguese

CRIME STORIES

The Seven Deadly Virtues	*Stanley Ellin*	5
Something Has To Break	*Norman Daniels*	27
Cui Bono	*Stephen Barr*	56

DETECTIVE STORIES

The Kidnaped Prime Minister	*Agatha Christie*	12
The Six Mistakes	*Holly Roth*	38
The Instrument of Darkness	*Melville Davisson Post*	61
Wally and the Three-Dollar Bill	*Paul W. Fairman*	110
Larceny and Old Lace	*Robert Arthur*	116

MYSTERY STORY

Death in Guatemala	*Frances Crane*	73

SERIAL: Conclusion

In the Fog	*Richard Harding Davis*	79

EQMM "FIRST STORY"

The Treasure of Pachacamac	*James Holding*	93
MYSTERY HARDCOVERS OF THE MONTH		26
MYSTERY PAPERBACKS OF THE MONTH		91
BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH	*Anthony Boucher*	55
INDEX TO VOLUME THIRTY-FIVE		130

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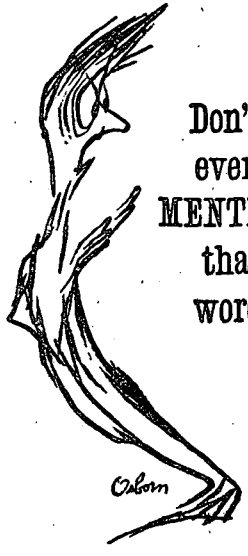

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a new story by

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**STANLEY ELLIN**
TITLE:	***The Seven Deadly Virtues***
TYPE:	Crime Story
LOCALE:	New York City
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*Do you remember Stanley Ellin's "The Blessington Method"? Here is a story that is entirely different—and yet it could have been conceived only by the same biting, satiric—shall we say, fiendish?—mind.*

AS A MERE STRIPLING, CHARLES realized that he had been happily endowed with good breeding, keen intelligence, and overwhelming ambition. In fact, so heated and furious was this ambition that it had been a matter of grave concern to his father before the lad was out of knee-pants. But such concern did not move Charles. His father was a good man, a kindly and humble clergyman who had spent a lifetime of genteel poverty at his vocation, but who was hardly a fit model for an enterprising son. For himself Charles had chosen a far more worthy model—none other than that renowned magnate, P.O.D. Evergreen, Founder and President of Evergreen Enterprises.

Although late in the field, Evergreen Enterprises had swiftly become the most titanic of titanic corporations. It produced and sold every conceivable product from which profit could be extracted. It leveled forests, drilled oil wells, bored mines, erected factories, swept the land, sea, and air with its carriers, and filled every avenue of public communication with its advertising. Banks kept its securities in the same portfolios as United States government bonds. Sprightly widows bought its shares with confidence that their declining years would be happy ones. Elder statesmen in Wall Street tipped their hats when they pronounced its name. To hold rank

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even as a Junior Executive in its councils was a distinction. And the future for an ambitious young man holding that distinction was a glowing one.

For these reasons, immediately after he graduated *summa cum laude* from the School of Commerce of New England University, Charles went to the New York office of Evergreen Enterprises, Inc. and applied for a position. He was placed in the hands of the Personnel Department, interviewed at length, confronted with batteries of tests, and re-interviewed. He was also informed that this process was only a method of appraising whether or not he would be allowed to face a final and fateful interview with P.O.D. Evergreen himself. So assiduous was this paragon among executives in seeking the right man for the right job that every deserving applicant for a place in his company's managerial staff had to be judged by him personally.

At last came the day when Charles was led into the office where behind a magnificent desk sat his idol, master of the greatest industrial empire on earth, boon companion to presidents and kings —yet, withal, a simple, unprepossessing figure, almost fatherly in the way he dismissed his secretary and waved Charles to a seat.

He said, "Well, my boy, we are going to have a little talk, and I think you will find it a strange one. In fact, I think you will find it shocking in some ways. That is because we are going to talk without using any of the cant, any of the mealy-mouthed and sugar-coated language on which you have, no doubt, been raised. Don't misunderstand me. I have no objection to fine moralistic and sociological jargon as it is used outside the confines of this office. In fact, I publicly indulge in it myself with the consolation that it's good business to deliver what the customer wants. But within these four walls I will have no part of it. Do you understand that?"

Charles assured him that he did.

"Excellent. Now tell me in plain, unvarnished words why you wish to work for this company."

Charles was prepared for that one. He said, "I am looking for the biggest and best market for my talents. There I can perform a worthwhile service which—"

The look in the President's eye stopped him short. P.O.D. Evergreen waited a moment and then said gently, "My boy, you are being glib. I have not asked you to prepare a tract for the conversion of the benighted heathen—that is not our business here. Or are you under the impression that it is?"

Charles hung his head.

"Come, come," said P.O.D. Evergreen, "there is no need to look so downcast. You have started off badly, true, but so has every other applicant I ever interviewed. It is

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necessary to draw up this sanctimonious bilge before we can reach the crystal waters beneath it. And even then I find that some applicants persist in defining their motives in such terms as *security* and *status*. This would be fatal to your prospects, my boy. I want you to use the honest equivalents—*money* and *power*—in discussing this matter. Because, in a nutshell, these are your motives, aren't they?"

"I'm not sure," Charles said, somewhat shaken. "I don't believe I've ever thought of it like that."

"Of course you have. You've simply been allowed to conceal the awareness of it from yourself by the vocabulary you've been instructed in. You want security, my boy, in terms of wealth that you can spend freely, and you want status based on a position of power. The greater the power you wield, the loftier the status. And I heartily approve of that—just as I approve of your coming to Evergreen Enterprises where such ambitions can best be gratified. Evergreen Enterprises is, as you put it yourself, the biggest and the best. Do you have any idea why?"

"Well, for one thing, the many products—"

"No, no, don't go off on that track. We supply nothing to the consumer that many another company does not supply as conveniently. And sometimes even more cheaply, for that matter."

Charles desperately grasped at a straw. "Efficiency, then? It is widely believed that Evergreen Enterprises operates at a level of efficiency unknown to any of its competitors."

"Right you are, my boy, and there's your answer. From the lowliest Junior Executive up to the Chairman of the Board, efficiency is the credo here. And the way we obtain it is the secret of our success. That secret enables us to find the most talented managerial team in the world, to hold that team together year in and year out with absolutely no turnover—an incredible feat in itself, you must admit—and to draw maximum effort from it at all times. What do you think of that?"

Charles said with deep feeling, "I have always felt my place was here, sir. I am more certain of it than ever."

"I am glad to hear you say so—it shows the kind of spirit we are looking for. But I wonder if you will feel the same after I fully explain what would be expected of you as a member of this team. In all fairness, my boy, I must warn you that this explanation will put you to your hardest test."

He spoke with a kindliness that touched the youthful applicant. Charles was full of resolve to prove his mettle. He said quietly, "I am ready to meet any test, sir."

"I hope so. And I will get down to cases by saying that before I founded this organization I care-

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fully studied the problems of others in this field. One weakness was quickly discernible in all of them: they simply could not get full value from their executives. Every high-salaried man of them had been so saturated by the moralistic nonsense he had been reared on that he could not release himself entirely to his job, where, of course, realistic attitudes must prevail. There was always a chasm between what he had been taught to be as a youth and what he had to practise on his company's behalf. Inevitably this made him guilt-ridden and subject to neuroses. It was a common condition. Still is, for that matter, but not here. Among the upper echelons of Evergreen Enterprises you will find only men who are well-balanced, well-adjusted, always ready and willing to give their best to the job."

"But how was that achieved, sir?" Charles asked with eager interest.

"Very simply, my boy. Have you ever heard of the seven deadly sins?"

"I have. My father is a minister, and so I am well-informed on this subject."

"That is all in your favor. Can you name them for me?"

"I can," said Charles. "They are pride, envy, anger, sloth, avarice, gluttony, and lust."

"Quite right. And have you ever indulged in any of them?"

Charles remained speechless.

"Oh, come, come, my boy," said P.O.D. Evergreen jovially. "There is no need to blush, no need to dissemble. If it is any comfort to you, let me say that I don't regard these alleged sins as sins at all. Why, they are the very foundations on which morale is built here!"

Charles scented a trap. "Are they?" he said warily.

"They are, indeed. Now force yourself to think of them, not as sins, but as virtues, and see if you do not immediately feel a great sense of release. Of ease, of assurance, of well-being. Aha, I see from your expression that you do. It's a remarkable feeling, isn't it?"

He was right. But then doubts flooded in on Charles. He said, "I don't see—"

"You will, my boy, you will."

The doubts remained. Charles said, "But let us take pride, for example. If I demonstrated it, wouldn't that stir up resentment against me?"

"Yes, but it would also advertise your worth to those who should know about it and otherwise might not. Imagine that you are working here in a lowly position. You come up with a good and profitable idea. In another company your immediate superior might steal that idea and claim credit for it. But here you are expected to express your pride in it so loudly that credit goes rightfully to you."

"That is what I mean. This will undoubtedly make my immediate

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superior and many others bitterly envious of me."

"It will, indeed. They will be eaten by naked envy until they come up with an idea to surpass yours. Then it will be your turn again. In this way we all prosper. Civilization is built on envy. The human race has always profited from it. Let us not disparage it."

Charles pondered this. "But," he said challengingly, "what about anger then? Surely, anger can't be made profitable in any case."

"No? Then imagine your precious idea put into the hands of an underling for commission, and badly botched through his ineptitude or neglect. How are you to protect yourself against a repetition of such a disaster? Through anger, my boy—violent anger turned against the offender so that the lesson is well learned. When word gets out that you have a reservoir of anger always in store, you will find your instructions carried out with uncanny efficiency. There's a magic virtue in unrestrained bad temper, believe me."

"Yes, I can see that," Charles admitted. "And I suppose that sloth, too—no, I'm afraid I can't see the businesslike virtue in sloth."

"Because you are still young and unrealistic. But sloth in its many forms—the surreptitious coffee break, the added time at lunch, the napping at the desk, yes, and a dozen other variants—is the finest possible tool for sharpening the wits. Not to be caught, that is the trick. The executive role is not for the drudge; it is for the one who has best developed the immense skill needed to conceal his sloth."

"That is hard to believe," said Charles.

"But nonetheless true. Show me the man eternally drudging away at the details of his job and I'll show you a born clerk. Show me the man who seems to be drudging away and isn't, and I'll show you a future Chairman of the Board."

Charles was glad to hear this. Despite his feverish ambition he was naturally slothful. That had worried him at times, but he could see that it need worry him no longer.

P.O.D. Evergreen said, "Yes, and the rest of those so-called vices are the soundest of virtues, too, when you view them honestly and intelligently. Avarice I hardly need speak of: it is the driving force behind any man worth his salt. And gluttony and lust have very much come into their own today—speaking, of course, in practical terms. The Evergreen Enterprises man who attends conventions or travels on business is the representative of the company in every way. If he can out-eat, out-drink, and out-copulate all competition, the prestige he earns goes to the company, and with it more business. Of course, we provide him with an obvious advantage. He is expected

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to engage in these activities without guilt or inhibition. No one will ever ask him to answer for his expense account or his morals. He is truly a free man.

"You see, my boy, there is nothing mysterious about our success here. Our standards are the usual ones, but instead of feeling guilty when you exercise them, you must see how wise and sane they are, and must glory in them. That is all there is to it."

The bright vista of the future swam before Charles' eyes in a golden haze. He said, "How simple and logical it all seems. Yet, how inspired it is. To let a man always be himself, to have him act naturally at all times—"

"Yes, my boy, and to have this be the very means by which he advances himself—well, it was inspired, I'll admit that. But then, such inspirations are my job. If I couldn't come up with them now and then, I would have no right to occupy my high position."

His friendly tone filled Charles with assurance. He said boldly, "I envy you that high position, sir. I would like nothing better than a chance to oust you from it and take your place."

P.O.D. Evergreen rose to his feet and thrust out a hand. "And that chance you shall have, my boy. If I had any doubts about your good qualities, they are completely settled by what you have just said." He shook Charles' hand with a powerful grip. "There, that is all the contract we need. I am sure that you have a great deal to offer Evergreen Enterprises; in return, it offers you a limitless future. When do you wish to start?"

"At once," said Charles.

"Good. Then I shall give you your final instructions now. For one thing, you will remember that our little talk here was entirely confidential. Our competitors will inevitably discover the solution to their problem, but there is no point in helping them do it. Moreover, if you were to confide what was said here to the world at large it would be misunderstood, and you would be the sufferer. You understand that, of course."

"I do."

"I am sure you do. Then tomorrow you will start as assistant to the head of a department. You will spend one year at that assignment, and it will be a year of probation, more or less. Everything depends on how you conduct yourself during that period. Then you will report to me and I will decide whether or not you are qualified to become a full executive." He smiled engagingly at Charles. "As you can see, my boy, I like to pull all the strings myself."

There was a weariness in the way he said it that made Charles feel suddenly humble. It was easy to see why this man commanded the fierce loyalty that he did.

"You can count on me, sir,"

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Charles said. He rose from his chair, not wanting to overstay his leave. "Is there anything else?"

"There is, my boy, but you must learn it for yourself through experience. Good luck in that."

It was one year later to the day when Charles was again summoned to the office of his President. He knew that he had done well during the year. Driven by ambition, guided by the good counsel given him, he had striven valiantly to make his mark. Yet, when he entered the presence of P.O.D. Evergreen he felt some apprehension. Were his efforts known? Would they be appreciated? He wondered about that.

P.O.D. Evergreen put his fears to rest at once. He said with affection, "My boy, you have acquitted yourself nobly. I have received many reports on you, and all of them make clear not only your many talents but also the degree of hatred and respect you inspire in your department. That is your most gratifying testimonial. You will be put in charge of that department."

Charles struggled for words. "I owe it all to you, sir," he said with an effort.

"No, no, my boy. It is your own spirit, your determination to succeed at all costs, that must get the credit. But tell me one thing. You have lived by my precepts for a year. During that time have you ever found yourself doubting their wisdom and merit?"

"Never," Charles said, striking the desk before him with his fist. "Not even when I considered that by following them to the letter I was irrevocably consigning my immortal soul to hell!"

"Hell?" P.O.D. Evergreen rose and stood there, a towering figure suddenly unearthly in his majesty. "You dare use that word here?" Then his eyes grew warm with nostalgia; his words came gently, filling Charles with awful enlightenment. "From here to eternity, my boy, you must think of it only as—The Home Office."

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**AGATHA CHRISTIE**
TITLE:	***The Kidnaped Prime Minister***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	Hercule Poirot
LOCALES:	England and France
TIME:	International Crisis
COMMENTS:	*How, as Sherlock Holmes did before him, Hercule Poirot averted a catastrophe which would have rocked the very foundations of the British empire . . . Now it can be told.*

NOW THAT WAR AND THE PROBlems of war are things of the past, I think I may safely venture to reveal to the world the part which my friend Hercule Poirot played in a moment of international crisis. The secret has been well guarded. Not a whisper of it reached the Press. But, now that the need for secrecy has gone by, I feel it is only just that England should know the debt it owes to my quaint little friend, whose marvelous brain so ably averted a great catastrophe.

One evening after dinner my friend and I were sitting in his rooms. After being invalided out of the Army I had been given a recruiting job, and it had become my custom to drop in on Poirot in the evenings and talk with him of any cases of interest that he might have on hand.

I was attempting to discuss with him the sensational news of that day—no less than an attempted assassination of Mr. David MacAdam, England's Prime Minister. The account in the papers had evidently been carefully censored. No details were given save that the Prime Minister had had a marvelous escape, the bullet just grazing his cheek.

I considered that our police must have been shamefully careless for such an outrage to be possible. I could well understand that the German agents in England would be willing to risk much for such an

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achievement—for he was more than England's Prime Minister—he *was* England; and to have removed him from his sphere of influence would have been a crushing and paralyzing blow to Britain.

Poirot was busy mopping a gray suit with a minute sponge. Never was there a dandy such as Hercule Poirot. Neatness and order were his passion. Now, with the odor of benzine filling the air, he was quite unable to give me his full attention.

"In a little minute I am with you, my friend. I have all but finished. The spot of grease—he is not good—I remove him—so!"

I smiled as I lit another cigarette.

"Anything interesting on?" I inquired after a minute or two.

"I assist a—how do you call it?—'charlady' to find her husband. A difficult affair, needing the tact. For I have a little idea that when he is found he will not be pleased. What would you? For my part I sympathize with him—he was a man of discrimination to lose himself."

I laughed.

"At last! The spot of grease, he is gone! I am at your disposal."

"I was going to ask you what you thought of this attempt to assassinate MacAdam?"

"Enfantillage!" replied Poirot promptly. "One can hardly take it seriously. To fire with the rifle—never does it succeed. It is a device of the past."

"It was very near succeeding this time," I reminded him.

Poirot shook his head impatiently. He was about to reply when the landlady thrust her head round the door and informed him that there were two gentlemen below who wanted to see him.

"They won't give their names, sir, but they says as it's very important."

"Let them mount," said Poirot, carefully folding his gray trousers.

In a few minutes the two visitors were ushered in and my heart gave a leap, for I recognized no less a personage than Lord Estair, Leader of the House of Commons, and Mr. Bernard Dodge, also a member of the War Cabinet, and, as I knew, a close personal friend of the Prime Minister.

"Monsieur Poirot?" said Lord Estair. My friend bowed. The great man looked at me and hesitated. "My business is private."

"You may speak freely before Captain Hastings," said my friend, nodding to me to remain. "He has not all the gifts, no! But I answer for his discretion."

Lord Estair still hesitated, but Mr. Dodge broke in abruptly. "Oh, come on—don't let's beat about the bush! As far as I can see, the whole of England will know the hole we're in soon enough. Time's everything."

"Pray be seated, messieurs," said Poirot politely. "Will you take the big chair, milord?"

Lord Estair started slightly. "You know me?"

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Poirot smiled. "Certainly. I read the little papers with the pictures. How should I not know you?"

"Monsieur Poirot, I have come to consult you upon a matter of the most vital urgency. I must ask for absolute secrecy."

"You have the word of Hercule Poirot—I can say no more!" said my friend grandiloquently.

"It concerns the Prime Minister. We are in grave trouble."

"We're up a tree!" interposed Mr. Dodge.

"The injury is serious, then?" I asked.

"What injury?"

"The bullet wound."

"Oh, that!" cried Mr. Dodge contemptuously. "That's ancient history."

"As my colleague says," continued Lord Estair, "that affair is over and done with. Luckily, it failed. I wished I could say as much for the second attempt."

"There has been a *second* attempt?"

"Yes, though not of the same nature. Monsieur Poirot, the Prime Minister has disappeared."

"What?"

"He has been kidnaped!"

"Impossible!" I cried, stupefied.

Poirot threw a withering glance at me, which I knew enjoined me to keep my mouth shut.

"Unfortunately, impossible as it seems, it is only too true," continued his lordship.

Poirot looked at Mr. Dodge. "You said just now, monsieur, that time was everything."

The two men exchanged glances, and then Lord Estair said, "You have heard, Monsieur Poirot, of the approaching Allied Conference?"

My friend nodded.

"For obvious reasons, no details have been given of when and where it is to take place. But, although it has been kept out of the newspapers, the date is, of course, widely known in diplomatic circles. The Conference is to be held tomorrow evening—Thursday—at Versailles. Now you perceive the terrible gravity of the situation. I will not conceal from you that the Prime Minister's presence at the Conference is a vital necessity. It is the universal opinion that the turning point of the Conference will be the strong personality of the Prime Minister. His absence may have the most serious results—possibly a premature and disastrous peace. And we have no one who can be sent in his place. He alone can represent England."

Poirot's face had grown very grave. "Then you regard the kidnaping of the Prime Minister as a direct attempt to prevent his being present at the Conference?"

"Most certainly I do. He was actually on his way to France at the time."

"And the Conference is to be held?"

"At nine o'clock tomorrow night."

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Poirot drew an enormous watch from his pocket.

"It is now a quarter to nine."

"Twenty-four hours," said Mr. Dodge thoughtfully.

"And a quarter," amended Poirot. "Do not forget the quarter, monsieur—it may come in useful. Now for the details—the abduction, did it take place in England or in France?"

"In France. Mr. MacAdam crossed to France this morning. He was to stay tonight as the guest of the Commander-in-Chief, proceeding tomorrow to Paris. He was conveyed across the Channel by destroyer. At Boulogne he was met by a car from General Headquarters and one of the Commander-in-Chief's A.D.C.s."

"*Eh bien?*"

"Well, they started from Boulogne—but they never arrived."

"What?"

"Monsieur Poirot, it was a bogus car and a bogus A.D.C. The real car was found in a side road, with the chauffeur and the A.D.C. neatly gagged and bound."

"And the bogus car?"

"Is still at large."

Poirot made a gesture of impatience. "Incredible! Surely it cannot escape attention for long?"

"So we thought. It seemed merely a question of searching thoroughly. That part of France is under Military Law. We were convinced that the car could not go long unnoticed. The French police, our own Scotland Yard men, and the military are straining every nerve. It is, as you say, incredible—but nothing has been discovered!"

At that moment a tap came at the door and a young officer entered with a heavily sealed envelope which he handed to Lord Estair.

"Just through from France, sir. I brought it on here, as you directed."

The minister tore it open eagerly and uttered an exclamation. The officer withdrew.

"Here is news at last! This telegram has just been decoded. They have found the second car, also the secretary, Daniels, chloroformed, gagged, and bound in an abandoned farm near C——. He remembers nothing except something being pressed against his mouth and nose from behind, and struggling to free himself. The police are satisfied as to the genuineness of his statement."

"And they have found nothing else?"

"No."

"Not the Prime Minister's dead body? Then, there is hope. But it is strange. Why, after trying to shoot him this morning, are they now taking so much trouble to keep him alive?"

Dodge shook his head. "One thing's quite certain. They're determined at all costs to prevent his attending the Conference."

"If it is humanly possible, the Prime Minister shall be there. God grant it is not too late. Now, mes-

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sieurs, recount to me everything—from the beginning. I must know about this shooting affair as well."

"Last night the Prime Minister, accompanied by one of his secretaries, Captain Daniels—"

"The same who accompanied him to France?"

"Yes. As I was saying, they motored down to Windsor where the Prime Minister was granted an audience. Early this morning he returned to town and it was on the way that the attempted assassination took place."

"One moment, if you please. Who is this Captain Daniels? You have his dossier?"

Lord Estair smiled. "I thought you would ask me that. We do not know very much of him. He is of no particular family. He has served in the English Army, and is an extremely able secretary, being an exceptionally fine linguist. I believe he speaks seven languages. It is for that reason that the Prime Minister chose him to accompany him to France."

"Has he any relatives in England?"

"Two aunts. A Mrs. Everard, who lives at Hampstead, and a Miss Daniels, who lives near Ascot."

"Ascot? That is near to Windsor, is it not?"

"That point has not been overlooked. But it has led to nothing."

"You regard the Capitaine Daniels, then, as above suspicion?"

A shade of bitterness crept into Lord Estair's voice. "No, Monsieur Poirot. In these days I should hesitate before I pronounced *anyone* above suspicion."

"*Très bien*. Now I understand, milord, that the Prime Minister would, as a matter of course, be under vigilant police protection, which ought to render any assault upon him an impossibility?"

Lord Estair bowed his head. "That is so. The Prime Minister's car was closely followed by another car containing detectives in plain clothes. Mr. MacAdam knew nothing of these precautions. He is personally a most fearless man and would be inclined to sweep them away arbitrarily. But, naturally, the police make their own arrangements. In fact, the Premier's chauffeur, O'Murphy, is a C.I.D. man."

"O'Murphy? That is a name of Ireland, is it not so?"

"Yes, he is an Irishman."

"From what part of Ireland?"

"County Clare, I believe."

"*Tiens!* But proceed, milord."

"The Premier started for London. The car was a closed one. He and Captain Daniels sat inside. The second car followed as usual. But, unluckily, and for some unknown reason, the Prime Minister's car deviated from the main road—"

"At a point where the road curves?" interrupted Poirot.

"Yes—but how did you know?"

"Oh, *c'est évident!* Continue!"

"For some unknown reason," continued Lord Estair, "the Pre-

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mier's car left the main road. The police car, unaware of the deviation, continued to keep to the high road. At a short distance down the unfrequented lane the Prime Minister's car was suddenly held up by a band of masked men. The chauffeur—"

"That brave O'Murphy!'" murmured Poirot thoughtfully.

"The chauffeur, momentarily taken aback, jammed on the brakes. The Prime Minister put his head out of the window. Instantly a shot rang out—then another. The first one grazed his cheek, the second, fortunately, went wide. The chauffeur, now realizing the danger, instantly forged straight ahead, scattering the band of men."

"A near escape," I exclaimed, with a shiver.

"Mr. MacAdam refused to make any fuss over the slight wound he had received. He declared it was only a scratch. He stopped at a local hospital where it was dressed and bound up—he did not, of course, reveal his identity. He then drove, as per schedule, straight to Charing Cross where a special train for Dover was awaiting him, and, after a brief account of what had happened had been given to the anxious police by Captain Daniels, he duly departed for France. At Dover he went on board the waiting destroyer. At Boulogne, as you know, the bogus car was waiting for him, carrying the Union Jack, and correct in every detail."

"That is all you have to tell me?"

"Yes."

"There is no other circumstance that you have omitted, milord?"

"Well, there is one rather peculiar thing."

"Yes?"

"The Prime Minister's car did not return home after leaving the Prime Minister at Charing Cross. The police were anxious to interview O'Murphy, so a search was instituted at once. The car was discovered standing outside a certain unsavory little restaurant in Soho, which is well known as a meeting place of German agents."

"And the chauffeur?"

"The chauffeur was nowhere to be found. He, too, had disappeared."

"So," said Poirot thoughtfully, "there are two disappearances: the Prime Minister in France and O'Murphy in London."

He looked keenly at Lord Estair, who made a gesture of despair.

"I can only tell you, Monsieur Poirot, that if anyone had suggested to me yesterday that O'Murphy was a traitor, I should have laughed in his face."

"And today?"

"Today I do not know what to think."

Poirot nodded gravely. He looked at his turnip of a watch.

"I understand that I have carte blanche, messieurs—in every way, I mean? I must be able to go where I choose and how I choose."

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"Perfectly. There is a special train leaving for Dover in an hour's time, with a further contingent from Scotland Yard. You shall be accompanied by a Military officer and a C.I.D. man, who will hold themselves at your dispoasl in every way. Is that satisfactory?"

"Quite. One more question before you leave, messieurs. What made you come to me? I am unknown, obscure, in this great London of yours."

"We sought you out on the express recommendation and wish of a very great man of your own country."

"*Comment?* My old friend the *Préfet*—?"

Lord Estair shook his head.

"Higher than the *Préfet*. One whose word was once law in Belgium—and shall be again! That England has sworn!"

Poirot's hand flew swiftly to a dramatic salute. "Amen to that! Ah, but my Master does not forget . . . Messieurs, I, Hercule Poirot, will serve you faithfully. Heaven only send that it will be in time. But this is dark—dark . . . I cannot see."

"Well, Poirot," I cried impatiently, as the door closed behind the Ministers, "what do you think?"

My friend was busy packing a suitcase with quick, deft movements. He shook his head thoughtfully.

"I do not know what to think. My brains desert me."

"Why, as you said, kidnap him, when a knock on the head would do as well?" I mused.

"Pardon me, *mon ami,* but I did not quite say that. It is undoubtedly their intention to kidnap him."

"But why?"

"Because uncertainty creates panic. That is one reason. Were the Prime Minister dead, ir would be a terrible calamity, but the situation would have to be faced. But now you have paralysis. Will the Prime Minister reappear, or will he not? Is he dead or alive? Nobody knows, and until they know nothing definite can be done. And, as I tell you, uncertainty breeds panic, which is what the enemy is playing for. Then, again, if the kidnapers are holding him secretly somewhere, they have the advantage of being able to make terms with both sides. The German Government is not a liberal paymaster, as a rule, but no doubt they can be made to disgorge substantial remittances in such a case as this. Thirdly, they run no risk of the hangman's rope. Oh, decidedly, kidnaping is their affair."

"Then, if that is so, why should they first try to shoot him?"

Poirot made a gesture of anger. "Ah, that is just what I do not understand! It is inexplicable—stupid! They have all their arrangements made—and very good arrangements too!—for the abduction and yet they imperil the whole affair by a melodramatic attack, worthy of a

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cinema, and quite as unreal. It is almost impossible to believe in it, with its band of masked men not twenty miles from London!"

"Perhaps they were two separate attempts which happened irrespective of each other," I suggested.

"Ah, no, that would be too much of a coincidence! Then, further—who is the traitor? There must have been a traitor—in the first affair, anyway. But who was it — Daniels or O'Murphy? It must have been one of the two, or why did the car leave the main road? We cannot suppose that the Prime Minister connived at his own assassination! Did O'Murphy take that turning of his own accord, or was it Daniels who told him to do so?"

"Surely it must have been O'Murphy's doing."

"Yes, because if it was Daniels' the Prime Minister would have heard the order and asked the reason. But there are altogether too many 'whys' in this affair, and they contradict each other. If O'Murphy is an honest man, *why* did he leave the main road? But if he was a dishonest man, *why* did he start the car again when only two shots had been fired—thereby, in all probability, saving the Prime Minister's life? And, again, if he was honest, why did he, immediately on leaving Charing Cross, drive to a well-known rendezvous of German spies?"

"It looks bad," I said.

"Let us look at the case with method. What have we for and against these two men? Take O'Murphy first. Against: that his conduct in leaving the main road was suspicious; that he is an Irishman from County Clare; that he has disappeared in a highly suspicious manner. For: that his promptness in restarting the car saved the Premier's life; that he is a Scotland Yard man, and, obviously, from the post allotted to him, a trusted detective. Now for Daniels. There is not much against him except the fact that nothing is known of his antecedents, and that he speaks too many languages for a good Englishman!—pardon me, *mon ami*, but, as linguists, you are deplorable! Now *for* him, we have the fact that he was found gagged, bound and chloroformed—which does not look as though he had anything to do with the matter."

"He might have gagged and bound himself, to divert suspicion."

Poirot shook his head. "The French police would make no mistake of that kind. Besides, once he had attained his object, and the Prime Minister was safely abducted, there would not be much point in his remaining behind. His accomplices *could* have gagged and chloroformed him, of course, but I fail to see what object they hoped to accomplish by it. He can be of little use to them now, for, until the circumstances concerning the Prime Minister have been cleared

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up, he is bound to be closely watched."

"Perhaps he hoped to start the police on a false scent?"

"Then why did he not do so? He merely says that something was pressed over his nose and mouth, and that he remembers nothing more. There is no false scent there. It sounds remarkably like the truth."

"Well," I said, glancing at the clock, "I suppose we'd better start for the station. You may find more clues in France."

"Possibly, *mon ami*, but I doubt it. It is still incredible to me that the Prime Minister has not been discovered in that limited area where the difficulty of concealing him must be tremendous. If the military and the police of two countries have not found him, how shall I?"

At Charing Cross we were met by Mr. Dodge.

"This is Detective Barnes of Scotland Yard and Major Norman. They will hold themselves entirely at your disposal. Good luck to you. It's a bad business, but I've not given up hope. Must be off now." And the Minister strode rapidly away.

We chatted in a desultory fashion with Major Norman. In the center of the little group of men on the platform I recognized a little ferret-faced fellow talking to a tall, fair man. He was an old acquaintance of Poirot's — Detective-Inspector Japp, supposed to be one of the smartest of Scotland Yard's officers. He came over and greeted my friend cheerfully.

"I heard you were on this job too. Smart bit of work. So far they've got away with the goods, all right. But I can't believe they can keep him hidden long. Our people are going through France with a toothcomb. So are the French. I can't help feeling it's only a matter of hours now."

"That is, if he's still alive," remarked detective Barnes gloomily.

Japp's face fell. "Yes . . . But somehow I've got the feeling he's alive."

Poirot nodded. "Yes, yes; he's alive. But can he be found in time? I, like you, did not believe he could be hidden so long."

The whistle blew and we all trooped up into the Pullman car. Then, with a slow, unwilling jerk, the train drew out of the station.

It was a curious journey. The Scotland Yard men crowded together. Maps of Northern France were spread out and eager forefingers traced the lines of roads and villages.

Each man had his own pet theory. Poirot showed none of his usual loquacity, but sat staring in front of him, with an expression on his face that reminded me of a puzzled child.

On arriving at Dover, Poirot's behavior moved me to intense amusement. The little man, as he went on board the boat, clutched desperately at my arm. The wind

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was blowing with great lustiness.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he murmured. "This is terrible!"

"Have courage, Poirot," I cried "You will succeed. You will find him. I am sure of it."

"Ah, *mon ami*, you mistake my emotion. It is this villainous sea that troubles me! The *mal de mer* —it is horrible suffering!"

"Oh!" I said, rather taken aback.

At the first throb of the engines Poirot groaned and closed his eyes.

"Major Norman has a map of Northern France if you would like to study it?"

Poirot shook his head.

"But no, but no! Leave me, my friend. See you, to think, the stomach and the brain must be in harmony. Laverguier has a method most excellent for averting the *mal de mer*. You breathe in—and out—slowly, so—turning the head from left to right and counting six between each breath."

I left him to his gymnastic endeavors and went on deck.

As we came slowly into Boulogne Harbor, Poirot appeared, neat and smiling, and announced to me in a whisper that Laverguier's system had succeeded "to a marvel!"

Japp's forefinger was still tracing imaginary routes on his map. "Nonsense! The car started from Boulogne—here they branched off. Now, my idea is that they transferred the Prime Minister to another car. See?"

"Well," said detective Barnes, "I shall make for the seaports. Ten to one, they've smuggled him on board a ship."

Japp shook his head. "Too obvious. The order went out at once to close all the ports."

The day was just breaking as we landed. Major Norman touched Poirot on the arm. "There's a military car here waiting for you, sir."

"Thank you, monsieur. But, for the moment, I do not propose to leave Boulogne."

"What?"

"No, we will enter this hotel here, by the quay."

He suited the action to the word, demanded and was given a room. We three followed him puzzled and uncomprehending.

He shot a quick glance at us. "It is not so that the good detective should act, eh? I perceived your thought. He must be full of energy. He must rush to and fro. He should prostrate himself on the dusty road and seek the marks of tires through a little glass. He must gather up the cigarette end, the fallen match? That is your idea, is it not?"

His eyes challenged us. "But I—Hercule Poirot—tell you that it is not so! The true clues are within—*here!*" He tapped his forehead. "See you, I need not have left London. It would have been sufficient for me to sit quietly in my rooms there. All that matters is the little gray cells within. Secretly and si-

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lently they do their part, until suddenly I call for a map and lay my finger on a spot—so—and I say: the Prime Minister is *there!* And it is so! With method and logic one can accomplish anything! This frantic rushing to France was a mistake—it is playing a child's game of hide and seek. But now, though it may be too late, I will set to work the right way—from within. Silence, my friends, I beg of you."

And for five long hours the little man sat motionless, blinking his eyelids like a cat, his green eyes flickering and becoming steadily greener and greener. The Scotland Yard man was obviously contemptuous, Major Norman was bored and impatient, and I myself found the time pass with wearisome slowness.

Finally I got up and strolled as noiselessly as I could to the window. The matter was becoming a farce. I was secretly concerned for my friend. If he failed, I would have preferred him to fail in a less ridiculous manner. Out of the window I idly watched the daily boat, belching forth columns of smoke as she lay alongside the quay.

Suddenly I was aroused by Poirot's voice close to my elbow.

"*Mes amis*, let us start!"

I turned. An extraordinary transformation had come over my friend. His eyes were flickering with excitement, his chest was swelled to the uttermost.

"I have been an imbecile, my friends! But I see daylight at last."

Major Norman moved hastily to the door. "I'll order the car."

"There is no need. I shall not use it. Thank Heaven the wind has fallen."

"Do you mean you are going to walk, sir?"

"No, my young friend. I am no St. Peter. I prefer to cross the sea by boat."

"To cross the *sea?*"

"Yes. To work with method, one must begin from the beginning. And the beginning of this affair was in England. Therefore, we return to England."

At three o'clock we stood once more on Charing Cross platform. To all our expostulations Poirot turned a deaf ear and reiterated again and again that to start at the beginning was not a waste of time, but the only way. On the trip back he had conferred with Norman in a low voice and the latter had dispatched a sheaf of telegrams from Dover.

Owing to the special passes held by Norman, we got through everywhere in record time. In London a large police car was waiting for us, with some plain-clothes men, one of whom handed a typewritten sheet of paper to my friend. He answered my inquiring glance.

"A list of the hospitals within a certain radius west of London. I wired for it from Dover."

We were whirled rapidly through

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the London streets. We were on the Bath Road. On we went, through Hammersmith, Chiswick, and Brentford. I began to see our objective. Through Windsor and on to Ascot. My heard gave a leap. Ascot was where Daniels had an aunt living. We were after *him*, then, not O'Murphy.

We duly stopped at the gate of a trim villa. Poirot jumped out and rang the bell. I saw a perplexed frown dimming the radiance of his face. Plainly, he was not satisfied.

The bell was answered. He was ushered inside. In a few moments he reappeared and climbed into the car with a short, sharp shake of his head.

My hopes began to die down. It was past four now. Even if he found positive evidence incriminating Daniels, what would be the good of it, unless he could wring from someone the exact spot in France where they were holding the Prime Minister?

Our return progress to London was an interrupted one. We deviated from the main road more than once and occasionally stopped at a building which I had no difficulty in recognizing as a hospital. Poirot only spent a few minutes at each, but at every halt his radiant assurance was more and more restored.

He whispered something to Norman who replied, "Yes, if you turn off to the left, you will find them waiting by the bridge."

We turned up a side road and in the failing light I discerned a second car, waiting by the side of the road. It contained two men in plain clothes. Poirot got down, spoke to them, and then we started off in a northerly direction, the other car following close behind.

We drove for some time, our objective being obviously one of the northern suburbs of London. Finally we drove up to the front door of a tall house, standing a little back from the road.

Norman and I were left in the car. Poirot and one of the detectives went up to the door and rang. A neat parlormaid opened it. The detective spoke.

"I am a police officer and I have a warrant to search this house."

The girl gave a little scream, and a tall, handsome woman of middle age appeared behind her.

"Shut the door, Edith. They are burglars, I expect."

But Poirot swiftly inserted his foot in the door and at the same moment blew a whistle. Instantly the other detectives ran up and poured into the house, shutting the door behind them.

Norman and I spent about five minutes cursing our forced inactivity. Finally the door reopened and the men emerged, escorting three prisoners—a woman and two men. The woman and one of the men were taken to the second car. The other man was placed in our car next to Poirot himself.

"I must go with the others, my

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friend. But have great care of this gentleman. You do not know him, no? *Eh bien*, let me present to you —Monsieur O'Murphy!"

O'Murphy! I gaped at him as we started again. He was not handcuffed, but I did not fancy he would try to escape. He sat staring in front of him as though dazed. Anyway Norman and I would be more than a match for him.

To my surprise we still kept on a northerly route. We were not returning to London, then! I was much puzzled. Suddenly, as the car slowed down, I recognized that were were close to Hendon Airfield. Immediately I grasped Poirot's idea. He proposed to reach France by airplane.

It was a sporting idea, but, on the face of it, impracticable. A telegram would be far quicker. Time was everything. He should have left the personal glory of rescuing the Prime Minister to others.

As we drew up, Major Norman jumped out and a plain-clothes man took his place. He conferred with Poirot for a few minutes, then went off briskly.

I, too, jumped out and caught Poirot by the arm.

"I congratulate you, old fellow! They have told you the hiding place? But, look here, you must wire to France at once. You'll be too late if you go yourself."

Poirot looked at me curiously for a minute or two.

"Unfortunately, my friend, there are some things that cannot be sent by telegram."

At that moment Major Norman returned, accompanied by a young officer in the uniform of the Flying Corps.

"This is Captain Lyall who will fly you over to France. He can start at once."

"Wrap up warmly, sir," said the young pilot. "I can lend you a coat, if you like."

Poirot was consulting his enormous watch. He murmured to himself, "Yes, there is time—just time." Then he looked up and bowed politely to the young officer. "I thank you, monsieur. But it is not I who am your passenger. It is this gentleman here."

He moved a little aside as he spoke—and a figure came forward out of the darkness. It was the second male prisoner who had gone in the other car, and as the light fell on his face I gave a gasp of surprise.

It was the Prime Minister!

"For Heaven's sake tell me all about it," I cried impatiently, as Poirot, Norman, and I motored back to London. "How in the world did they manage to smuggle him back to England?"

"There was no need to smuggle him back," replied Poirot dryly. "The Prime Minister has never left England. He was kidnaped on his way from Windsor to London."

"What?"

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"I will make all clear. The Prime Minister was in his car, his secretary beside him. Suddenly a pad of chloroform is clapped on his face—"

"But by whom?"

"By the clever linguistic Captain Daniels. As soon as the Prime Minister is unconscious, Daniels picks up the speaking-tube and directs O'Murphy to turn to the right, which the chauffeur, quite unsuspicious, does. A few yards down that unfrequented road a large car is waiting, apparently broken down. Its driver signals to O'Murphy to stop. O'Murphy slows up. The stranger approaches. Daniels leans out of the window, and, probably with the aid of an instantaneous anesthetic, such as ethyl-chloride, the chloroform trick is repeated. In few seconds the two helpless men are dragged out and transferred to the other car, and a pair of substitutes take their places."

"Impossible!"

"*Pas du tout!* Have you not seen music hall turns imitating celebrities with marvelous accuracy? Nothing is easier than to impersonate a public figure. The Prime Minister of England is far easier to understudy than Mr. John Smith of Clapham, say. As for O'Murphy's 'double,' no one was going to take much notice of him until after the departure of the Prime Minister, and by then he would have made himself scarce. He drives straight from Charing Cross to the meeting place of his friends. He goes in as O'Murphy, he emerges as someone quite different. O'Murphy has disappeared, leaving a conveniently suspicious trail behind him."

"But the man who impersonated the Prime Minister was seen by everyone!"

"He was not seen by anyone who knew him intimately. And Daniels shielded him from contact as much as possible. Moreover, his face was bandaged up, and anything unusual in his manner would be put down to the fact that he was suffering from shock as a result of the attempt upon his life. The deception was perfectly easy to keep up as far as France. There it would be impracticable and impossible—so the Prime Minister disappears. The police of this country hurry across the Channel, and no one bothers to go into the details of the first attack. To sustain the illusion that the abduction has taken place in France, Daniels is gagged and chloroformed in a convincing manner."

"And the man who enacted the part of the Prime Minister?"

"Rids himself of his disguise. He and the bogus chauffeur may be arrested as suspicious characters, but no one will dream of suspecting their real part in the drama, and eventually they will be released for lack of evidence."

"And the real Prime Minister?"

"He and O'Murphy were driven

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straight to the house of 'Mrs. Everard,' at Hampstead, Daniels' so-called 'aunt.' In reality, she is Frau Bertha Ebenthal, and the police have been looking for her for some time. It is a valuable little present that I have made to them—to say nothing of Daniels! Ah, it was a clever plan, but he did not reckon on the cleverness of Poirot!"

I think my friend might well be excused his moment of vanity.

"When did you first begin to suspect the truth?"

"When I began to work the right way—from *within*!—I could not make that shooting affair fit in—but when I saw that the new result of it was that *the Prime Minister went to France with his face bound up* I began to comprehend! And when I visited all the hospitals between Windsor and London and found that *no one* answering to my description had had his face bound up and dressed that morning, I was sure! After that, it was child's play for little gray cells like mine!"

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **NORMAN DANIELS**

TITLE: ***Something Has To Break***

TYPE: Detective-Crime Story

DETECTIVE: Lieutenant Perrin

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Not every murderer is an evil person inside. Some are driven to kill by forces beyond their strength to resist. And when such a person realizes the meaning of the "sins of the fathers," something has to break . . .*

SOMEBODY HAD RIPPED A LARGE cardboard packing box in half and placed it over the body so that only the dead man's feet showed and he looked as if he were in a pup tent.

"Twenty-nine stories," the traffic cop told Lieutenant Perrin. "I was on duty at the corner when I heard somebody yell. He just sailed down and . . . there he is."

"What do you know about him?" Perrin asked.

"Name's Alfred Cameron. He's got an office on the twenty-ninth floor. A patrolman went up to see what happened."

Lieutenant Perrin entered the building and took the elevator to the right floor. It was as quiet up there as if a man falling out a window were an everyday occurrence. A harness cop stood just inside the offices of Stone and Cameron. He saluted the badge Perrin had pinned on his lapel.

The cop said, "In that office—he fell out the window."

"How do you know he fell?" Perrin asked softly.

"I don't, but the only other person here is the dead man's partner and he says that's what happened. His name is Victor Stone. You'll find him in there."

The Lieutenant walked to the indicated office door and opened it without knocking. The man be-

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hind the desk was about fifty, a well put-together individual inclined to be husky, with a thick neck and a broad face. His eyes were tightly closed as if he wanted to shut out something.

The detective said, "I'm from the precinct. Lieutenant Perrin."

Stone opened his eyes. "Have a chair, Lieutenant. I'll tell you what I know, though it isn't much."

"Go ahead, Mr. Stone."

"Cameron and I have been in business for twelve years. We're building contractors. He stayed in the office mostly, and I went out on the job. I came in about five fifteen. The employees had gone home, but Cameron was in his own office. I'm sure of that because I called to him and he answered me."

"Then you didn't actually see him?"

"No. I had a few details to take care of, so I sat down at my desk and went to work. I haven't any idea what happened, but I heard him scream. I ran in. He wasn't there, of course. I went looking around the other rooms for him. Then I heard a siren and I began to realize what must have happened. That's everything I know."

"Did he have any reason for jumping?"

"None that I'm aware of, Lieutenant."

"Insurance?"

"If you mean business insurance benefiting me—we had none. His personal insurance I know nothing about, though I suppose he carried some. He leaves a wife."

Perrin said, "I'll take a look in his office if you don't mind."

"Go right ahead," Stone said. "You'll excuse me if I stay here."

On his way out Perrin stopped and put his hand on an aluminum box on a chair. It carried an address tag and some postage stamps.

Stone said, "My son's laundry. He goes to college. I mail it to him every week."

Perrin said, "I went through that once myself, so I know what you mean. I'll be right back."

Victor Stone closed his eyes again. After a moment he touched his left wrist lightly. Pulse steady.

He got up and went to a wall mirror. The veins in his throat didn't throb. If he was scared, it simply didn't show, but when old Foster, the building porter, came in quietly and coughed to attract his attention, Stone spun around in a nervous movement.

Foster said, "Too bad about Mr. Cameron."

"Yes—too bad." It sounded flat, but Stone couldn't say it any other way.

"I came for the laundry. You want I should mail it on my way to supper?"

"If you don't mind." Stone gave him the customary small tip.

Foster took the money, picked up the package. "How's the boy making out?"

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"He doesn't say much," Stone told him. "All right, I suppose."

Foster, package under his arm, walked casually out of the office. It was ten minutes later that Lieutenant Perrin entered again. He sat down in the leather chair directly in front of Stone's desk.

"Nothing seemed to be disturbed," the detective said. "The floor is pretty heavily waxed. He could have slipped."

"Could have?" Stone said. "He did, Lieutenant. No one else was in that office."

"Only one thing, Mr. Stone. I sent word down to examine the body. I wanted to know if any buttons happened to be missing on the dead man's shirt. Because—under the desk in his office—I found this."

He placed a small bit of white cloth with a button sewn to it on Stone's desk. Stone looked at it, then stood up and unbuttoned his coat. He showed all the buttons on his shirt, turned back his coat sleeves and showed that the shirt-sleeve buttons were also in place.

"Funny thing," Perrin said. "Cameron's shirt was okay too."

"The button could have been under the desk for days," Stone said. "Cleaning in this building isn't what you'd call thorough. I never saw anybody clean under a desk."

Perrin put the button in a small pill box and tucked it into his pocket. "You wouldn't mind coming down to headquarters for a while, Mr. Stone?"

"Not if it's necessary."

"We have to get signed statements. Won't take long."

Stone asked, "May I phone my wife?"

"Sure thing—go ahead."

Stone made the call. Ellen was a chornic worrier, so he didn't say much beyond the fact that Cameron was dead. He hung up, arose, and put on his hat.

Perrin was looking at the chair on which the laundry box had rested. "Did you take that out and mail it?" he asked.

"No. The building porter has been mailing it for me for the past two years. He took it out. Why?"

"Well . . . nothing, I guess. Oh, yes we're going to search your office. Is it okay or do we get a warrant?"

"Go ahead and search it," Stone said. "The way you're handling this, anybody's think I shoved Cameron out of the window."

Perrin smiled and nodded. "Trouble is, if we don't handle the case this way, that's exactly what some people will say. We want to absolve you, Mr. Stone, but even more, we want our own position clear. So we don't take any chances."

At headquarters, Perrin was much more inquisitive. He asked many questions, some of them over and over with an annoying repetitiveness. Stone answered each question with patience and a remarkable restraint of anger. Finally he

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signed a seven-page document of his testimony and it was eleven o'clock before they let him go.

"I'm sorry about all this," Perrin said.

Stone managed a smile. "It hasn't been pleasant, but at least not boring either, Lieutenant. Is it all right if I go to my office in the morning?"

"We cleaned under the desk," Perrin said. "But you can thank us some other time if you like."

"Did you find anything?"

"Hardly. If we'd found the shirt that button came off of, I don't think you'd be going out now. As it is, I'll have a squad car drive you home."

Ellen was still awake and badly worried. She kissed him soundly and hugged him close. "It's been coming over the radio," she said. "And television too. I'm frightened, Vic."

He led her into the kitchen, looked into the refrigerator, and set out some cold meat, bread, and milk, and made a mental note to have some ice cream from the freezing compartment.

"There's nothing to worry about, Ellen," he said. "Poor Cameron just fell out the window. Maybe he was looking out, maybe he slipped. Nobody knows how it happened—just that it did. I was his partner so they needed my story. That's all there is to it. Now try to forget the whole thing, at least for tonight."

"Vic, are you sure you're not in trouble?" Ellen persisted.

"They've finished with me," he said. "It's over."

"But you and Cameron had been fighting lately over the business and his lazy ways. I thought, if the police found that out . . ."

"Darling," Stone said, "that was one of the first things I told them. Sure we quarreled, but I didn't kill him and there isn't a living soul who can prove I did. I'm free. I wasn't arrested. I don't even think I was suspected."

She believed him, just as she always did. They talked of Cameron and what they'd do about buying out the dead man's share in the firm; about his widow and her problems. It was two in the morning before they went to bed. Stone didn't sleep very well.

He was worried about that box of laundry. If Lieutenant Perrin was smart as he acted, he'd have someone go to Don's dormitory at college and check that laundry box before Don got it. The crumpled shirt with a button torn out lay on top of all the clean clothes. There'd been no time to find another hiding place.

He thought about calling Don, but realized that was out of the question. If he did, and Perrin learned about it, he'd surely have the laundry box checked. As matters stood, perhaps Perrin was satisfied. Stone had to take the chance. He thought the odds were in his favor, but that thought wasn't com-

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forting enough to help him fall asleep. The next morning he felt terrible as if he had a bad hangover.

Daylight and pressure of business, especially the arrangements for Cameron, kept him so occupied he could hardly think. By noon he felt better, but the phone call from Donald set his nerves jangling again.

Don said, "Hello, Pop. Is everything okay?"

"Yes . . . okay," Stone said. "There's no reason for you to come home or get excited about anything."

"Good, because I was worried. You see, the local law brought my box of laundry instead of the mailman this morning. They'd opened it."

Stone held his breath. "I expected that, Don. Something to do with a torn shirt."

"Well, they didn't find anything. No shirts were torn. They apologized and went away. I just thought you'd like to know."

"Thanks," Stone said. "I appreciate your calling."

"Say, Pop, they're not trying to involve you in Cameron's death, are they?"

"Just routine stuff. I'll tell your mother you called."

"Good—and dad, I'll be home this week end. I'm bringing Russ Boland along. If it's okay."

"It's fine. Your mother will be glad to see you. Thanks again."

"Sure, Pop. You're a pretty good guy—you know that? So long. See you Friday night."

Stone hung up slowly, blotted the perspiration off his face before any of the office staff saw it, and forced himself to concentrate on work. Lieutenant Perrin drifted in late that afternoon. He closed the door and sat down.

"We're getting nowhere," the detective admitted cheerfully.

"About what?" Stone asked.

"Cameron's murder."

"Murder? When did you decide it was murder?"

"Ten minutes after I got here. I think you did it, Stone."

Stone sat all the way back in his chair. "Lieutenant, I don't know whether to laugh or get sore."

"Do either, or both. You had a good reason for killing Cameron. He shirked his work, he practically stole from the firm, he was ruining it. That's not the strongest motive in the world, but I've seen men kill for a lot less. I think you stood it as long as you could, then pushed him."

"Why don't you arrest me?"

"Oh, no it wouldn't stick. Everything is too simple. A prearranged kill gives itself away. This kill wasn't arranged. It just happened. And you're smart. You don't protest too loudly and you don't talk too much."

"Then if you can't arrest me, why do you come here and make this silly accusation?"

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"It's just a statement of fact, Stone. I only wanted to be sure you didn't think you were getting away with it completely. Might give you the idea you could get away with it again. The fact is, you're plain lucky. Nothing else—just lucky."

"Goodbye," Stone said.

Perrin got up, walked to the door, and opened it. He looked back. "I'll see you, Mr. Stone."

Stone poured water out of the thermos on his desk. His hand didn't shake at all. He drank the water, had more, and took two stomach pills. Then he phoned Ellen to tell her Don was bringing his roommate for the week end. That taken care of, Stone went back to work.

Friday night at dinner, Don and Russ dominated the table talk. Don was slim, reedy in comparison with his father. He had a facile mind, an outward good nature, and an inward ability to hate desperately. All this, Stone had known for a long time.

Russ Boland was in distinct contrast to Don. He was an intense, brooding sort of boy, darkly handsome, and vain about it. Stone had never liked him and wondered why Don did.

Don said, "We've got to leave very early Sunday morning, Mom."

"I don't see why," Ellen said. "It's only a three-hour drive back to school."

Don smiled and winked at Russ. "The fact is, Mom, Russ got a speeding ticket on our way here this afternoon. He has to be in court Monday morning and he has exams Monday afternoon, so he has to do his Monday morning studying on Sunday."

"A traffic ticket?" Ellen asked, with the natural worry of a mother. "But I thought you were such a careful driver, Russ."

Russ shrugged. "Everybody makes a slip some time, Mrs. Stone. Don't worry I'll crawl all the way back. I wouldn't want another ticket. In this state, three of those tickets in a row and they take your driver's license away."

"Three?" Stone asked. "You were caught once before?"

"Yes, sir. I've learned my lesson though."

"I should hope so," Stone said. "Don, I'd like to talk to you in the den."

Stone closed the door, sat down, and carefully lit a cigar before he spoke to Don. He'd been thinking of this talk, hating it, but knowing it was necessary.

"About the laundry box sent you the day Cameron fell out the window. I think it needs some sort of explanation."

"Not to me it doesn't, Dad. Or are you asking why they didn't find that torn shirt?"

"I was afraid of this," Stone said. "What happened?"

"Look, Dad, I don't care why you did it. In fact, I didn't even know that you did—but I heard the story

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over the radio late that night. It mentioned something about a torn shirt. That meant nothing to me until the next morning. I didn't have an early class, so I happened to drift past the dean's office and two state troopers were there, asking about package mail delivery. I knew the packages were dumped in the gym and sorted later. I went down there. Nobody was around, so I opened my laundry box. It's only strapped shut, so it was easy. I saw the crumpled shirt on top. I just took it out, that's all."

"I think I owe you an explanation," Stone said again.

"You don't owe me a thing. I carried the shirt out back and burned it and destroyed the ashes and buried the buttons. I couldn't even find the spot myself. That's all there is to it, so forget the whole thing."

"Thanks," Stone said.

"It's okay. Now I better get back to Mom and that heel, Russ."

"I wondered why you brought him," Stone said. "I thought you were just about ready to break up with him."

"I'm going to. Remember that cute brunette I was going with? Well, Russ took her away from me. He's taken every girl—every one I cared anything about—away from me. I think he gets a big kick out of it."

"Then why did you bring him here? Why do you persist in going with him?"

Don tapped a cigarette out of his pack and lit it with an angry gesture. "He wanted to come—for the free meals. But I'm telling you—he's taken his last girl from me."

"You'll make out," Stone said. "And Don—thanks for not asking questions. For taking things as you did."

"That's okay. I'd be a fine son if I didn't. You know something—I think I got the smartest dad there is."

Stone expanded slightly. "One way of being smart, son, is to keep your mouth shut."

Don nodded. "I won't forget."

Stone had some work to do at home and settled down to it. Around midnight he finished, yawned, and felt easy in mind. He lit a fresh cigar and wandered out to the front porch. The creak of a rocking chair off in the darkness gave him a nervous start and sent his heart pounding.

Then Russ Boland's voice came out of the gloom. "Did I startle you, Mr. Stone?"

"Why—no. Not exactly. I didn't know you were there."

"Don went to bed early, but I wasn't tired."

Stone walked over and sat down on the porch rail. "Look, Russ," he said, "why don't you take it easy on the road?"

"It wasn't my fault either time. Don should have got both tickets."

Stone drew gently on the cigar. "Do you mean that Don was driving?"

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"Oh, no—but he was to blame. The first time—a couple of days ago—he said you'd just passed us and he wanted me to catch up. Well, we caught the car okay, but Don had made a mistake. He sure did—a patrol car was right behind us. Then, the second time, he said it was Peggy, one of his girl friends, who just sailed past. Like a fool I started after that car too and the same thing happened."

"You had the car, you were behind the wheel," Stone pointed out.

"Just the same," Russ said, "I figure Don ought to pay."

"Don has a regular allowance. Take it up with him."

"I'm going to take it up with you, Mr. Stone. Don just makes a lot of promises and never keeps them."

"Promises about what?"

"Well . . . look, I'll lay it on the line. You want Don to stay in school, don't you?"

The tip of Stone's cigar glowed red. "What are you talking about, Russ?"

"I hate to do this, but I'm in a jam. I haven't got enough money for the fines and my old man wouldn't advance me a dime. It's up to Don, but he says he won't help me. So you've got to—or I won't keep quiet any longer."

"You've got something on Don, haven't you? He's been paying you off right along. Isn't that true?"

Russ said, "It's like this, Mr. Stone. About two months ago Don dated heavy and didn't do much studying. There was an exam coming up and he wasn't prepared, so he cribbed it."

"You made him buy your silence?"

"Not exactly." Russ gave a dull laugh. "Don was so dopey he left the notes he cribbed from in his exam paper when he handed it in. He was afraid to break into the proctor's office and get the crib papers back, so I offered to do it. For fifty bucks."

"That was very good of you, I must say." Stone wondered how he kept his hands off Russ.

"Oh, but that's not all," Russ went on. "He didn't have the fifty, so he swiped it out of half a dozen lockers during a basketball game. They figured I did it and they gave me a hard time. The way I see it, Don ought to pay me for my troubles."

Stone said, "If you tell the truth about Don, I agree that he'll be expelled, but you will be too. Did you ever think of that?"

"Me?" Russ asked. "I'd like nothing better. My old man won't let me quit."

"How much?" Stone asked.

"Two hundred ought to be just about right, Mr. Stone."

"Does Don know you're asking me for this money?"

Russ laughed again. "If he did, he'd probably kill me. But I'll need the money to pay the fine, and for other things."

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"Good night," Stone said and walked slowly back into the house. He knew how Don felt. It had been the same between him and Cameron. Irritation at first, and then slowly rising anger that turned into a consuming hatred until it blew off in that office fight. The same thing could happen with Don. Stone thought it over in the privacy of the den and finally threw off the whole notion as foolish and fantastic.

At one o'clock he went to bed, but he didn't sleep too well. Ellen had some pills and he took two of them. When he awoke it was nine thirty on Saturday morning—and he'd meant to reach the office early. When the staff was off, he usually got more work done.

Yet, when he had breakfasted, he didn't feel like going to the office. Instead, he moped around the house. Ellen drove into town, and Don and Russ were off on some mysterious trip which neither talked about.

Stone felt better when everyone got home and there was dinner on the table and some fairly bright conversation along with the food. It turned out that Ellen had bought a new hat, some shoes, and was weighing the pros and cons of a new dress; Russ and Don had dated a couple of girls and gone riding—things which would have ordinarily passed through Stone's mind without registering. Now he found them interesting—in fact, entertaining. So long as he was with someone, he managed not to think of Cameron.

They played cards until eight thirty and then Russ and Don had more dates. Ellen was tired and went to bed early. Stone had no inclination for sleep, so he sat in the den catching up on his reading.

It was odd, he thought, how jumpy he'd become lately. Probably age had a great deal to do with it, though 48 wasn't very old. Something gave a dismal creak somewhere in the house. It made Stone think that must be just how a coffin lid sounds. Why he had this silly idea, he didn't know, but it robbed him of any further desire to read and made him wish he wasn't quite so alone. Any moment he'd hear the terrible scream that Cameron had cried out when he began his dive to the ground.

Around one in the morning he dozed and the closing of the front door made him jump. It was Russ and Don coming in. As always, they stopped off in the kitchen to raid the refrigerator. Stone decided against joining them. Instead, he turned out the light in the den and sat down facing the door. He was entirely in darkness.

After a little while Russ came past the door. Just beyond it he paused. His voice was a hoarse whisper. "Heck, Don, I got plenty of cigarettes. Why go out to the car?"

"I like my brand better," Don

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whispered back. "See you in a couple of minutes."

Russ ran lightly upstairs and a moment later the front door closed softly. Stone waited only a few seconds, made his way through the house, and reached the kitchen. There he walked slowly, not turning on any lights until he was at the back door. Through the glass upper half he could look out to the garage.

Don was just letting himself into the garage. He left the door open and the streak of a flashlight beam signaled where Don was. Stone stepped briskly but lightly over the grass, avoiding the cement walk. When he reached the door, he risked a quick look inside. It was a large garage, capable of holding three cars though there were only two in it now and one of these was Russ Boland's second-hand convertible.

Don, at the other end of the garage, was in the act of opening a large metal tool cabinet, and from this he took a length of iron pipe—about two feet long. He carried it over to Russ' convertible and opened the door. He knelt on the cushion to force it down, slid the cloth-wrapped piece of pipe behind the seat, and made sure it was tightly wedged and out of sight.

Stone turned back before his son was finished. He knew what it was all about. He knew that Don was setting the stage to murder his roommate whom he hated. Two traffic tickets would insure a reputation for wild driving. Then an accident—preceded by a blow with the iron pipe. Don would be thrown clear, Russ would die. It was so simple, so easy, that it was bound to work.

Stone waited until Don returned to the house. Then he removed the iron pipe from the convertible and threw it far back of the house. He began walking. Once he turned around and looked back. The light in the room Russ and Don shared winked out as he watched. His son was sleeping with a man he intended to kill the next morning.

Stone found himself walking along a silent street. Headlights swung around a corner, bathing him in light and the milkman's truck rolled to a stop.

"Hey, Mr. Stone," the milkman called. "You okay?"

"Yes fine," Stone replied. "How are you?"

"Great. I always feel good when I finish my route. On my way home now. Want me to drop you at the house?"

"I'm going downtown," Stone said.

"Okay—I go right through the center."

Stone climbed in, grateful for the ride. If he walked that long distance he might change his mind. Because he wanted to talk to someone, he said, "A man can be six kinds of a fool and get away with it, but there's one kind he can never afford

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to be. When his foolishness becomes an inspiration for someone else to do something just as foolish, he has to take stock with himself."

"It's a goofy world," the milkman agreed.

"A father and son, for example—now there's something sacred. It ought to be that way. Like father, like son—you know the old saying."

"Yeah, sure." The milkman wondered if his wife would believe that the nice Mr. Stone who gave generous Christmas presents to his milkman was a plain drunk with dreams.

"The time comes," Stone went on, "when something has to break."

"Kids will be kids," the milkman said. "Where'll I drop you, Mr. Stone?"

"The police station if you don't mind."

"Just one block off my route home. I hope there isn't any trouble."

"There was, and there might be," Stone said, "but I'll see to it that everything is taken care of."

The milkman was more than happy to let him off. Stone walked into the police station. A sleepy desk sergeant glanced at him idly.

"I want to see Lieutenant Perrin," Stone said.

"About what, mister?"

"Tell him," Stone said, "it's a man about a murder."

Two minutes later Stone walked down a long, long corridor. Perrin's office was at the end of it like the end of the route to eternity.

Stone pushed the door open.

Perrin looked up.

The lieutenant said, "Sit down, Mr. Stone. I've been expecting you."

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Some of the magazines that try to compete with EQMM, in England as well as in the United States, have had no hesitation in the past to reprint stories which originally appeared in the pages of EQMM. This, we suppose, is the sincerest form of flattery, and we are properly grateful—although it is only fair to admit that our gratitude is often a mixed emotion, particularly when the flattery by EQMM's competitors is overdone.

But it is the exception, of course, that proves the rule. On rare occasions we too have reprinted competitors' stories—perhaps twice in ten years— and here is one of those rare occasions. Holly Roth's "The Six Mistakes" was published by "Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine," from which, by the way, we have never reprinted before. When we read "The Six Mistakes" we were sorry that somehow it had failed to come our way first. If you have never read the story (especially, you loyal readers of EQMM), it is certainly worth making one of our rare editorial exceptions to bring it to you now; if you did happen to read it a few years ago, you'll find this absorbing tale of mystery and suspense worth a rereading.

But don't let this unusual exception to our editorial policy mislead you. We leave it to our competitors to keep on reprinting EQMM stories on a sometimes lavish scale—for in EQMM you will continue to get the finest original detective-crime short stories being written today, by both "name" writers and newcomers, by famous literary figures and beginners; in EQMM you will continue to get the finest of reprints, including forgotten and neglected gems of the past and, as you know, many a "discovery" previously undreamed of even by the aficionados of the genre.

THE SIX MISTAKES

by HOLLY ROTH

THERE WAS SOMETHING WRONG with the setup—something didn't fit.

He pulled out the bottom drawer of his desk and propped his feet on its edge; then he sat and stared at the smudgy proofs. But the trouble wasn't in the article itself; he had

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made a good job of it. The proofs showed a full-page title, *Where Are the Child Wonders Now?* There was the box by a "famous psychiatrist," there were the pictures of Alphonso Peter Leonard he had taken a few days before. And Leonard, looking lanky and engaging, added to the piece. It was a good layout.

It was, taken all together, good Sunday supplement stuff. The million Sunday readers in Pennsylvania and New York would lap it up. But still Blake wasn't happy about it. Something—about Leonard? about Leonard's apartment? —didn't add up.

The city room of the paper was almost empty—it was noon on Saturday—and the quietness bothered him. City rooms are never very noisy. For one thing, the ceilings are usually too high, and everybody is concentrating—on business or something else. Nevertheless, there is a kind of punctuated bustle. Although the punctuation changes from moment to moment, there is always some distracting element—one reporter yelling to another, a typewriter that not only clacks but rebounds with a tired grunt at every touch, a loud-mouthed reporter on a phone . . . One learns to overcome the noises, and that Saturday, with nothing to overcome, Blake found it hard to concentrate.

Another distraction was the lack of light. Heaven knows he had had enough practice working in spite of that handicap. As he sat peering by the desk-lamp's light at the blurred proofs he started up his usual burn. Why should he sit bang in the middle of the big room so that the tall windows on three sides were all twenty feet from him? He wasn't the last to be taken on; three men had come in after him.

But the boss always looked weary when Blake mentioned moving to another desk. And the boss wasn't the only one who didn't like him; not a single fellow in that room was worth the powder to blow him to hell—although that would have been a good spot for all of them.

Blake's eyes had returned to the proof and he was again trying to pitch on the note that was out of key when the Features Editor came in and started toward his own cubbyhole. He walked straight ahead, seeming oblivious of everything except his destination; it was obvious that in spite of the room's echoing emptiness he was going to pretend he hadn't seen Blake.

Blake yelled, "Hey, Ed."

Ed Vorst stopped and turned slowly, with the weary look.

Blake ignored it. He said, "How do you like the piece? The first in the prodigy series?"

Vorst's weariness soured into irritation. "I haven't complained, have I? I'm running it."

"Yes, but I wondered if you liked it."

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Vorst said, "Listen, you manage to get more money for less work than anyone else in the place. While you're at it, you get in everyone's hair. And now you want compliments, too?"

The whole row of flimsy partitions shook as he slammed his door behind him. All Blake could do was concentrate on the day that would come—that day when he could kick them all in the teeth. Somewhere, somehow, he would find a money angle, a payoff gimmick, a short cut to success. Money . . .

And then it hit him. That was it, that was what was wrong with the Leonard setup. It was too plushy. There was too much money. Where was all the money coming from?

He had been given the assignment three weeks earlier. It was to be routine supplement stuff—a series of articles, all under the same title. Each week Blake was to resurrect the story of some flash-in-the pan prodigy and, under subtitles like *From Beethoven to Bartender* tell, in pseudo-scientific terms, the story of the child's fantastic success and his subsequent failure to fulfill this promise of genius.

It was a good circulation gimmick. Child prodigies intrigue people. They have a triple appeal: first, there's the simple pull toward children; second, prodigies have something of the unhealthy fascination of side-show freaks; and third, they inspire an unadmitted envy the side-show doesn't. No one wants to weigh 550 pounds, but when a five-year-old twirp can multiply ten-digit numbers in his head, or conduct *Aïda,* then the average man thinks, What tumblers are clicking in that kid's cranium that aren't ticking in mine?

To this triple play Blake had been instructed to add an irresistible fourth: the articles were to satisfy the readers' human nature by showing that the prodigies, no longer cute kids, had got their comeuppance.

The natural for the lead, of course, was Alphonso Leonard. No other prodigy ever had such scope, such an unbelievable variety of abilities.

Blake brought himself up to date in the "morgue," the paper's library. Alphonso Leonard, at seven, had made his piano debut at Carnegie Hall. The critics' reviews still glowed on the brittle "morgue" clippings. At eight Alphonso was awarded a scholarship at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. When he was ten he went into two months' retirement, and it was only by a fluke that his emergence was recognized as being coincidental with the famous *History of the World,* the well-written, masterly volume that was the standard textbook in many colleges and universities for ten years after.

The clips on Alphonso went along like that until 1940, when he was fourteen. He had followed his

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History with the *Definitive Analysis of Politics in the United States* and a half dozen other accomplishments, all—with the exception of one—masterfully done. The one exception was sculpture. Alphonso was an amateur sculptor. If he had been anyone else, he might have been considered good. As it was, he was considered mildly promising. At fourteen, after the publication of his *Human Relationships,* he stopped producing—and stopped being news.

So Alphonso Leonard was the Number One lead. But although Blake was an excellent bloodhound it took him a week just to find Leonard. Apparently Leonard had done nothing to encourage anonymity; he had simply slipped into mediocrity—but that's such a large category it makes sifting difficult. Also, he had begun to call himself "Alf," and the public utilities had converted that into "Alfred."

Then when Blake did find him—or, at least, when he had tracked down a Leonard who seemed a likely prospect—he was never at home. Blake began to feel that he was going to spend the rest of his life questioning the caretaker and watching the windows of the fourth-floor front of the converted brownstone house at 472 West Seventy-third Street.

But when he pushed the button of Apartment 4A at eight o'clock sharp on the fourth morning of his vigil, the door opened.

The man who stood there was youngish, about thirty, very tall, and there was something—a kind of shy but rugged good looks—that made Blake think the boss would have liked him. That didn't make Blake warm to him particularly.

Blake said, "Alphonso Leonard?"

An odd second followed. The man in the doorway had been smiling rather tentatively. The smile went away and his eyes seemed to open a little wider. Blake had a feeling that his own thirty-seven years had been correctly estimated and that the hole in the toe of his left sock was a known factor.

But the second passed, the shutter in the man's eyes clicked, and the eyes relaxed to a narrower gauge as his smile returned. He said, "Well, not many people call me that, but it *is* my name." He held the door open. "Come in."

It turned out to be quite a place—well-furnished, with a lot of books and pictures and some interesting pieces of sculpture. Blake contrasted it with the dump he lived in and thought that he wouldn't have minded having it himself.

Leonard led him into the kitchen, pushed a coffee cup into Blake's hand, and as he busied himself over a frying pan, said, "I didn't know reporters ever got up as early as this."

So he was a smart alec. Blake said, "I hadn't mentioned that I'm a reporter."

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There was a pause while Leonard gave him a fast brace of eggs with some kind of fancy ham fencing them in, and sat down to his own breakfast. Then he said, "No one else would call me Alphonso. Simple as that."

"I see. But I've got the right person?"

"Well—I'm the healthy, normal remains of that fouled-up kid, if that's what you're looking for."

So it began to look as if Blake's series was off to a good start. Leonard had practically written the subhead for him.

"Look," Leonard added, "as I remember you boys, nothing short of a top-secret label will stop you. And that doesn't always work. So I'll tell you whatever you want to know—though I can't imagine why you should be interested in me—but there's a 'but.'"

He looked at Blake earnestly and persuasively, but Blake wasn't scouting for a popularity contest. He asked what the hook was.

"If you're going to print anything about me, please leave out the address, and leave out the Alf—it has almost the force of an alias. When I was a kid, you newspaper guys gave me a pretty bad time of it. I was doing what seemed normal and enjoyable to me, and I was made to feel as if I were someone in a circus. How would you have liked it if every time you played marbles you got a big headline?"

That remark sounded like a crack, especially as, at seven years, Blake had been playing marbles. But a promise was cheap, so Blake said, "Okay, it's a deal. I don't want much, anyway. Just how you live and how you feel about things." He gave Leonard a judiciously edited explanation of the projected series of articles.

Leonard picked up Blake's second cup of coffee and his own and led the way into his book-filled living room. The room had windows on three sides and it was sunny and warm. Blake relaxed as Leonard installed him in a deep chair and gave him a cigarette and a statement.

"I minded my childhood a lot," he said. "I always felt that all that was different about me was that I had a superabundance of energy. Anyone can learn anything or do anything if they have energy enough."

Blake let that ride. Maybe it was a modesty gambit. Maybe it was on the level. Leonard seemed to believe it, but his opinion on the causes of genius was beside the point.

"I've felt since that if my ability had been restricted to one field, they'd have left me alone—comparatively. I'd have given *anything* to be left alone." He spent an introspective moment looking sorry for himself—just because he'd got some headlines, Blake thought sardonically—and then he went on.

"Well, it doesn't matter any more. I outgrew it all. I'm thirty-

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one. Since I was twenty-two I've been earning a living by my sculpture. I'm not very good at it, but I enjoy it and do well enough to manage. In there—" he gestured over his shoulder at an archway behind him—"I sculpture originals of 'novelties,' as they are called in the trade. I sell 'em to pottery companies and they mass-produce them. I make—oh, it varies between seventy and a hundred dollars a week, and that's enough for me. I'm not married and, as you may remember, I've got no family."

Blake nodded. By cranning his neck he could see into the little studio adjoining the living-room. Small dead-white pieces of sculpture, sculptors' tools, some wooden pedestals . . .

It was a good angle. Of all his facets Alphonso Leonard had matured into the one in which he was least proficient. As in the case of so many promising amateurs, he had become a mediocre pro.

The little black panther on the table beside Blake had been on the periphery of his consciousness since he entered the room. It was done in ebony, he decided; a small but flowing jewel of a beast with such beauty of line, from its alert ears to the ominous stance of its tail, that it continually caught his eye.

He jerked his thumb at the small figure and said to Leonard, "Your work?"

Leonard's laugh came from way down, and it seemed entirely spontaneous. "Lord, no! That's an original Erickson. If I could turn out a thing like that I wouldn't be hacking for the trade."

"Oh. Well, it's—pretty. Handsome." Blake shrugged away the inadequacy of his adjectives, and asked Leonard a few more questions—whether his books brought him any royalties, for instance. Leonard pointed out that they weren't the kind that ever hit the best-seller lists, and that the few bucks they had brought were long since gone. To establish the point, Blake asked if he had ever inherited any money.

Leonard said, "No. No, I live by my work. Want to see some of it?"

They went into the small studio and Blake looked over the pieces Leonard had on hand. They were quite competent—little plaster-of-Paris animals and figurines—but Leonard was right: his sculpture couldn't touch the Erickson piece in his living-room.

And that seemed to be the end of it.

Blake wrote up the story and as he went to work on the next victim, should have forgotten Leonard. But something about the setup had haunted him, and now, three weeks later, the clue had hit him like a slash in his paycheck.

Leonard had said he earned between seventy and a hundred dollars a week, which seemed a probable range for his kind of work.

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He had no other income; he had no inheritance. Well, Blake earned ninety bucks a week, owed money to anyone who would give him the chance, and lived in two rooms, not five. Blake's furniture couldn't stand comparison with Leonard's; his neighborhood was far inferior; and he certainly didn't wear the kind of imported tweeds Leonard had had on.

And Blake didn't possess any original Ericksons.

So money was coming from somewhere. Where? Well, maybe it dropped through Leonard's chimney, but Blake didn't think so. He had a hunch.

He telephoned Leonard who, for once, was at home. When he said, "Hullo?" Blake dropped the receiver into place without answering and hurried over to Leonard's neighborhood. He moved quickly into the vestibule of the building across the way from number 472, and then he waited.

It was a long afternoon. There was no place to sit and after a couple of hours Blake was a victim of aching arches.

Finally, in the early dusk, Leonard, carrying a brief case, left his apartment house. His long legs took him briskly to the corner where he hopped a cab. Blake had no trouble getting one right behind him.

They paraded across town, and twenty minutes later Leonard got out of his taxi and entered a small, beautifully kept private house. Blake instructed his driver to drive past, got out at the corner, and called the paper from a public phone booth. He gave the copy desk the address of the house and asked them to find out who lived there. Then he stood looking through the glass booth at the house Leonard had entered.

The paper called back soon after. The house belonged to Professor A. J. Rimsen.

Blake walked slowly away, climbed on a bus, and started toward his home. But he found he couldn't sit still, and a few stops after, he got off and walked. As he walked he groped for the elusive explanation of what was bothering him.

At first it had seemed reasonable enough that Alphonso Leonard should visit A. J. Rimsen. At first. Then questions started eating into him. Rimsen was the mathematical genius who was called in as a consultant, for reputedly astronomical fees, by industrial and engineering concerns when they hit experimental snags. His knowledge and his practical application of it were said to be invaluable.

So a connection between Rimsen and Leonard seemed likely. Leonard was a mathematical genius, too, wasn't he?

Or was he? He had said, "I outgrew all that." Outgrew what? The knowledge, the ability to apply it, the interest, or the energy? It was an intriguing question.

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Blake couldn't have said then if he was fascinated by the explanation of what happened to the mind of a man like Leonard, if it was purely a reporter's instinct for a story, or if he had an inkling of the truth. But he was fascinated.

He grew more fascinated the next day.

At ten thirty the next morning Blake rang the bell of Professor Rimsen's little house. A middle-aged motherly type opened the door. Blake asked if the professor was at home.

"Yes, he is. You have an appointment?"

"No. But I've a letter of introduction."

"I'm afraid—"

"I'm from San Francisco. Some friends of his from Berkeley—near the University—" Blake raised an inquiring eyebrow, and the woman nodded—"asked me to see him."

"But I can't—"

Blake didn't let her finish. Ride it fast was his formula for bluffing an entry. "I've got the letter here." He started a search of his pockets, expecting to be invited in before the abortive search ended.

But the woman said, "I'd suggest you leave the letter. Then the professor can call you and make an appointment."

"But I'll only be here for another twenty-four hours. If you'd just *ask* him—"

"I can't do that."

"I don't think he'd mind in this case—"

"You don't understand," she said uncomfortably. "I mean I *can't*. I can't reach the professor."

I thought you said he was in?"

She sighed. "It's so difficult . . . If Professor Rimsen expected you he'd come down and let you in or leave a message with me for you. But I have no way of reaching him."

Blake stared at her. "He lives here, doesn't he?"

"Yes. I'm Mrs. Schwartz, his housekeeper." Blake nodded. He was in no mood for observing the amenities. "When the professor locks that door—" she nodded at an innocuous-looking door on her right—"I can't reach him. He's usually away, you know, and then he leaves it unlocked. But sometimes I find it locked when I didn't even know he'd come back." She added defensively, "He's not peculiar. He's a very nice kind man. He isn't even like a hermit. He sometimes gives keys to friends. But I can't—" She tapered off lamely.

"How does he eat?"

"He comes down, opens the door. Anyway, it isn't always locked. I'm sorry—"

"It's okay. Goodbye." She was still murmuring little apologies as Blake walked off.

Blake went to a corner drug store, ordered a cup of coffee, and sat staring through the plate glass at the neat little house.

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He recalled the photograph of Rimsen he had come across in the morgue files that morning when he was concocting a story that would gain him entry to the house. Rimsen was in the rear of a fuzzy group shot of scientists taken at a dinner. He looked forty-fiveish, a pleasant-faced man with a Vandyck. But Blake had just learned that, pleasant or not, Rimsen was an eccentric. So what? Geniuses usually were. Even, according to the authorities, slightly batty. Did Rimsen's eccentricity have any . . .

Alphonso Leonard, in his distinctive tweeds, emerged looking very uneccentric—gangling, good-looking, and normal. He ambled toward the drug store, passed it, and rounded the corner.

It was not yet eleven o'clock. Leonard *might* have called on the professor again that morning. But Blake was inclined to think that the two gentlemen had spent the past sixteen hours together and he was sure they hadn't been playing gin rummy. They had been *working*—he would have made a bet on that, a big bet.

Blake chased after Leonard who was less than a block away, still in plain sight. Leonard continued to take it straight and slow for the next hundred yards; then he turned east and entered another house. This was one of those elegant little town houses with a painted door, and across the front were low wrought-iron palings topped with shining brass knobs. A small brass plaque beside the gate said *James P. Glasser.*

Blake spent the next week finishing up enough features to get ahead of his deadlines. The last three days of the week he called Leonard every couple of hours but got no answer. He decided Leonard was probably "visiting."

Glasser's name had made him sure his hunch was right. Glasser was the man who wrote that popular opera, *Tomorrow's Return.* And if "popular opera" was a contradiction in terms, so was Glasser. He was the phenomenon of Broadway. He wrote *good* music that had the general appeal of a pop recording of *White Christmas.* He had turned out only three things—two operas and an operetta, but they had been smash hits and had netted him a fortune in cash and a reputation rivaling Puccini's.

Blake didn't know much about music, but he *did* know that Glasser made a lot of money.

Leonard finally answered his phone and Blake gave a repeat performance: he hung up without saying anything and hot-footed it over to Seventy-third Street.

This time Leonard didn't keep him waiting. He was on his way out as Blake's taxi approached his door. Leonard got another cab at the corner and away they went in neat procession.

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They rode downtown on the West Side to Greenwich Village. As they snaked in and out of the little streets Blake caught a glimpse of Leonard sitting on the edge of his seat, directing his driver. Blake decided that Leonard had made plenty of trips down to that neighborhood, that he was again en-route to the home of a good friend —a partner?

They finally stopped in front of a large, comfortable-looking apartment house, and by the time Blake followed Leonard into the lobby the elevator was on its way down again. When it got there Blake tackled the elevator man.

"Did a tall dark man go up?"

He looked at Blake blankly. It finally cost a dollar to refresh his memory: the man who had ridden up had gone into the apartment of Jules Williamson.

On the way back to the office Blake did a little worrying about his expenses. He had to make up the extras Leonard was costing him, but he had long before established a high degree of padding in his "swindle sheet" and it would be difficult to raise the total much higher.

It was probably the business of mulling over the expense account and what Leonard was costing him that crystallized the idea that had been slowly forming in his mind. It was a pretty slick idea, but it could be dangerous.

He added Jules Williamson's name to the little roster that was growing in his notebook under the heading *Alphonso Leonard*. Blake knew who Williamson was without any checking. The general public didn't know anything about him, but newspapermen knew a little. There was no designation for his profession other than "ghost writer" but that wasn't strong enough.

Williamson was the vellum-bound, gold-tooled edition. His main outlet was politicians. He wrote speeches that tipped the globe—when they came sonorously out of cabinet members and Presidential hopefuls. And he didn't restrict himself to speeches. The rumor was that two of the current best-sellers were ghosted by him.

So there was the roster: Professor A. J. Rimsen, James P. Glasser, and Jules Williamson. They represented a lot of money. Blake was positive that they paid Alphonso Leonard a lot of money. Money was a thing Blake didn't have. It might turn out to be a simple matter to adjust.

Leonard was going to be Blake's meal ticket. Leonard still had the "energy," as he had called it. He must, Blake decided, have been bursting with it—unable to subdue his drive, his knowledge, his clicking brain. But he had been stung by the side-show aspect of genius and had taken an ingenious way out.

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He probably did earn around a hundred bucks a week by his sculpture and probably enjoyed the work. But he must have produced a normal man's weekly output in a couple of hours, as a sort of game, and devoted the rest of his time to serious consultation on music, mathematics, and political works.

The more Blake thought about it, the better the setup seemed, and the more foolproof. From the logical standpoint it seemed like money in the bank but, as it turned out, there was an angle he hadn't taken into consideration.

The next night, a rainy, nasty night, Blake decided to show his hand. Leonard answered his phone and Blake asked to drop in.

Leonard said, "Do."

"Do" isn't what Blake would have called a lengthy speech and he wouldn't have thought that much expression could be packed into it; but it did seem to him that Leonard sounded less cordial than he had remembered—in fact, almost ominous. But he decided that that was a lot to read into one word and shrugged the notion off.

At Seventy-third Street he walked west from the bus. The Hudson River lay ahead of him, and as he peered through the heavy rain, that usually mild river's choppy whitecaps and the lightning-slashed lowering sky above it made it look like the Atlantic in an angry moment. It was a bad night.

Leonard was again waiting at his open door and for the second time that evening Blake built an impression on nothing. But it seemed to him that the man standing in the doorway looked bigger, brawnier, older than he had on the morning a few weeks earlier when he had smiled a welcome. He wasn't smiling now.

He ushered Blake into the same living-room and installed him in the same chair. He was as courteous as he had been on the first occasion, but more formal—not in the least off-hand. And on this occasion the sun wasn't streaming through the east window and the heavy curtains drawn over the west windows obscured the view of New Jersey.

Leonard didn't slouch in a chair opposite Blake and he didn't push a coffee cup into his hand. Instead, he stood against a tall bookcase; above him an electric spotlight, partially concealed by the molding, sent a pool of light on a picture just above Blake's head. Blake wasn't in a strong glare; Leonard wasn't in darkness—but that, somehow, was the effect.

It was all very different from what Blake had expected and he found it hard to go into his prepared act.

Then Leonard helped him out. "For a reporter you miss some pretty obvious facts. For instance, when people sit forward behind the driver in a taxi they get the

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same view through the rear-view mirror as the driver does." He paused.

Lord, he was big. Blake decided that the baggy tweeds and the negligent, loose-limbed way he usually carried himself had made him seem slighter and shorter. And perhaps the lighting in the room was accentuating his breadth. But Blake didn't think so. His voice seemed deeper, too.

He said, "You've been following me."

It was an opening and Blake plunged. "Well, yes, I have. Sometimes it's part of my job, you know." It seemed to Blake that Leonard was *growing*. He hurriedly decided to condense the rather elaborate build-up he had rehearsed.

"I've got a damn good story, Mr. Leonard. Exposing Mr. Glasser and Professor Rimsen—and, to a lesser degree, Mr. Williamson—is a story in itself. But the human interest touch, the ability you have retained that enables you to advise and work with such men—and men in such varied fields—would be of even greater interest to our readers."

"Would be?"

Blake began to wish Leonard would stop feeding him his lines. "Well—"

"You propose to print this story?"

"Well, I thought . . ."

"Yes? What is it you thought?"

"I thought you seemed like a nice guy, and I thought—" Blake stopped. None of the words came out. They sat and stared at each other for a second, and then Blake tore his eyes away. He had just discovered that Leonard had another ability: he was an actor.

Blake didn't know then, and he never did find out, which was the real Leonard—the affable, gangling, charming young man shrinking inside baggy tweeds? Or the threatening, almost sinister giant who, without moving, seemed to be leaning over him?

Leonard moved, and as the spell lessened, Blake caught his breath with relief. But the relief didn't last.

Leonard said, "I'll tell you what you thought. You thought you were going to be a rich man. You're a fool. You decided to enter a new profession—blackmail"—it wasn't a word Blake had ever intended to use—"and you didn't even bother to find out the basic tenets of your new art. Blackmail, stupid one, can be brought off by playing on one of only three fears: fear of legal reprisal"—as he ticked a finger, Blake's eyes followed the hand and then went back to Leonard's darkened, magnetic face—"two"—flick—"fear of public shame, and three, fear of great monetary loss.

"There are a couple of other facts you overlooked. When you decided that my desire for privacy would

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make me a good subject, you forgot that I am able to pick up and leave at any moment, and always, *anywhere,* earn rather more than a living. I wouldn't have to sit here like a target pinned to a wall and wait for you to come with your popgun and win a prize."

That was reason Number Four. Blake's eyes—obediently, stupidly, fascinatedly—followed Leonard's hand as he ticked the fourth finger.

"Most of all, you forgot that *I don't want* such a story published or even mentioned. Didn't you?"

The little flicks of the finger had reached Number Five. Blake was obsessed by an unreasoning fear that Leonard would go beyond that hand, that he would reach Number Six. He looked up and was even more terrified to realize that Leonard knew, had planned and planted that fear. Leonard knew what Blake thought, intended, hoped. He knew—

"Didn't you forget?" The low voice was almost a whisper.

Blake said, "Yes. I forgot. I'm sorry."

"You can go now."

Blake's ridiculous relief at the dismissal didn't evaporate until he had reached home. Not until he was securely inside his two shabby little rooms did anger overcome him. He hadn't been hypnotized; that was a childish idea. No, he had been *acted* out of his plan. He wasn't really a coward, he decided furiously, and he certainly wasn't a fool. Leonard was bigger, much bigger than he, and in a couple of respects Leonard's points were well made.

Blake hadn't thought it through; he hadn't anticipated some of the angles. But if he just crumbled like an old tenement, if he let himself be bluffed, his plan of money was shattered. He was back to ninety a week, two small rooms, no car, the expression of tired distaste on the face of the boss. His plans were dead. His life was dead.

Yet even that realization couldn't make him tackle Leonard again. No. But in spite of Leonard, in spite of his "stupid one"—funny, archaic phrase—Blake wasn't a complete fool. There was another way.

This time Blake did think it through. And carefully. Leonard had taught him the "tenets of his new art," and who was Blake to shrug off the lessons of a genius? Fear of public shame; fear of monetary loss. Those two little flicks—the very word made him uncomfortable—applied exactly to Professor Rimsen and Mr. Glasser.

Ethically, if not legally, they were dishonest. They were picking another man's brains. Of course, he was willing to be plucked and he was being paid for it, but just the same they were misrepresenting. And they certainly weren't going to be happy about the threat of exposure. When you do something

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like they're doing, Blake thought, you're liable to get tagged. So Blake was going to play tag.

Best of all, he would be safe from Leonard. No one could appreciate Leonard's fear of publicity more thoroughly than his partners. They existed as fortunate partners simply because of that fear. In the event of exposure they would lose not only honor and much of their income—they would lose Leonard. Because he would do just what he said: take off for other fields.

Williamson didn't seem worth bothering with. He was entirely unknown to the public. He apparently had no pride of authorship. Besides, it would matter little to his clients who turned out their masterpieces.

And Rimsen was hard to get to.

So, for a start, Mr. James P. Glasser. Blake decided to tackle him from the office.

Glasser answered the phone himself. As soon as Blake mentioned his paper Glasser said he'd be delighted to be interviewed. He was very cordial. After all, Blake thought, when you're in the theatrical world, even if you're at the top, publicity does no harm.

They made a date for the next afternoon at five o'clock. Glasser said Blake should come for a drink and the thought went through Blake's mind that Glasser would need a stiff one himself.

But after he had hung up, Blake didn't feel quite so complacent. He sat and stared at the nearest window, twenty feet away—I'm in the darkness, always in the darkness, he thought. Chaotic, unassembled thoughts flashed through his mind. Glasser's voice, that picture of Rimsen with the Vandyck. Rimsen's one-way door. Williamson's anonymity. Glasser's voice . . .

He tried to pull himself together. But there was something about their names, too. A. J. Rimsen; Jules Williamson; James P. Glasser. The names weren't really alike; they merely had a vague similarity of cadence. All they literally shared was a "J." That was not an astounding coincidence and besides, "Alphonso Leonard" had *no* "J" and *no* "son."

But he knew. All of a sudden and without any really conscious piecing together, he knew. They were all the same man. They were all Leonard.

Blake pulled himself together again. Wait, he told himself, think it through. It's not impossible and it's certainly not supernatural. The whole thing is simply a masquerade on a grand scale.

Leonard is masquerading as four men. Looking at it carefully, he could see that that solution was even more plausible than the idea of Leonard as a multiple "ghost." Of course, Blake decided, a masquerade. That was it. Of course.

Well, then, what of his plans, his money?

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Blake looked round the room—at the distant windows, at the workers—and hated everything he saw. Was he doomed to sit at that desk for as long as he could last, in the literal dimness and the symbolic darkness? The only way to get something was to get something for nothing. This was a creed in which he firmly believed. And he had had that something for nothing almost within his grasp. Was it gone? Was he back in the darkness?

After a half hour's struggle he came to a decision—a daring but necessary decision: he would go through with the plan. He would pretend that he still saw the four men as separate entities. He would blackmail James P. Glasser.

Leonard had lied to the extent of a half truth when he said that he could always pack up and go somewhere else to ply his many professions. Blake saw now that while Leonard certainly *could* go, he *wouldn't*. Too many years, too much planning had gone into his four identities. He wouldn't want to desert them.

If Blake played it straight it would be worth Leonard's while to make at least one payment to protect those four identities. And Blake himself would be somewhat protected from Leonard's awful wrath by his pretense of dealing only with Glasser. Perhaps, if he could make the payoff stiff enough, he would never have to go back, never have to face "Glasser" again . . .

He pushed the thought aside and set to work. He used the rest of the day and part of the next to write up his story. There was going to be nothing haphazard about his presentation this time. He was merely a reporter offering Glasser an opportunity to defend himself before Blake submitted the story of his duplicity to his editor. The offer of money would come from Glasser. And any man in his position would make the offer.

It was still a workable plan.

When Blake opened the little iron gate in the graying light of early dusk he was completely prepared for any eventuality. His nerves were under control, and he felt resourceful and firm-willed.

Glasser opened the door himself. He turned out to be a stooped, bespectacled, graying man. It was so convincing a job of make-up and acting that Blake was a little disconcerted. After rumbling a few pleasant words, Glasser led him through several connecting rooms toward the rear of the house.

Blake had trouble keeping his eyes on the stooped back ahead of him because of the incredible, the unique wealth of the surroundings. Everything was old—the best the centuries had to offer. The antique Russian rugs, the paintings hanging on every inch of wall spelled more money than Blake had ever

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seen gathered in one place before. Mentally, he raised his price, but he lost another fraction of his self-possession.

When they reached a rear study his host installed Blake in a tapestry chair which it seemed sinful to sit on.

It was a low-ceilinged, darkish room, lit only by the light of a single barred window in the rear wall. The window looked out on a cheerless cement-paved court. The room was packed; one could hardly call it cluttered since every one of its hundreds of objects was distinctive—odd, beautiful, expensive. But—packed or cluttered—the room gave Blake a breathless, smothered feeling.

Glasser had moved across to a silver tray on which crystal glasses were waiting. He said, "You like my house?" His back was toward Blake, but something—power? personality?—radiated from him.

Blake made an effort, and although even to his own ears he sounded a little stifled, he managed to bring out a few polite words: "I certainly do. I've never seen such a collection of antiques. They're beyond me, of course. I can't estimate their—their importance."

The man turned from the tray. He had two drinks in his hands as he approached Blake. He said, "You mean their value, don't you, sir?"

He hadn't turned on the lights yet and it was getting darker in the room. He seemed to be moving very slowly, and as he moved he was straightening up getting taller. It came to Blake that Leonard was throwing away the disguise, and the smothered feeling grew on him. He had thought he was prepared for every eventuality, but, after all, he wasn't.

He wasn't prepared for this one. It was mad of Leonard to expose his hand like this. How could Blake have anticipated a stupid move on the part of a genius? How could Blake handle it? His every breath seemed harder to draw. It was dark in the low-ceilinged room, and airless.

The man came over, put the drinks down on a little table, and raised one of his hands to his face. He removed his glasses. For a minute Blake clearly saw three men—the figure before him looked like the picture of Professor Rimsen, with the deepening shadows supplying the effect of a Vandyck. Glasser's gray hair and bulk were still there.

But the size and the terrible power of Alfonso Leonard was taking over, taking over . . .

Blake said, and heard the ridiculous squeak that was suddenly his voice, "Why are you telling me this? Showing me this? I had no intention of exposing your masquerade! It's insane to—to—" He stopped.

Insane? What had his research

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on genius taught him? Certainly not that geniuses were insane. But there had been the constant suggestion that when mental ability reached too great a development, sanity might be left behind.

Leonard said, "Masquerade?" His voice was low, but it echoed and swept back from all sides of the tight, suffocating room. "Masquerade! If this were only a masquerade I should let you go. What would it matter to me if the world saw a masquerade? But the truth —that's different. I am not yet ready to let the world know of the power of split man, of the multiplied, diffused personality. *I am four men,* stupid one!"

He brought his hand down, the eyeglasses dangling, and he extended the thumb of the other hand.

"Stupid one"—his voice was the merest whisper—"I warned you—I warned you not to make the sixth mistake!"

The shadow of his outstretched hand grew huge—filled the entire room—and Blake's last vision was of the gigantic thumb turned down above him.

There's a new RANDOM HOUSE MYSTERY every month. This month's:

A deadly triangle of suspicion, jealousy and hatred

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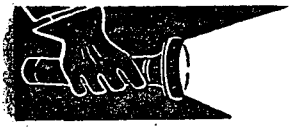

BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

If you want some first-grade caviar as hors d'oeuvre to your murder-munching, look into Friedrich Duerrematt's novella TRAPS (Knopf, $1.25). Ably translated by Richard and Clara Winston, this grotesque chiller is the first Duerrenmatt fiction published here to compare in macabre irony and power with his play THE VISIT.

★★★★ **PASSAGE OF ARMS, *by Eric Ambler*** (Knopf, $3.95)

American tourist hurled into the thick of the Malaya-Sumatra gun-running traffic. Acutely observant of character and politics, and the liveliest Ambler adventure since his war-time hiatus.

★★★★ **THE DEVIL'S OWN, *by Peter Curtis*** (Crime Club, $2.95)

Witchcraft survives, quiet and deadly, in rural England today. The strongest novel of ancient terror in many seasons.

★★★★ **CAT AMONG THE PIGEONS, *by Agatha Christie*** (Dodd, Mead, $2.95)

The Old Dazzler in top technical form as Hercule Poirot investigates murder and Arab politics in a model girls' school.

★★★★ **MY BROTHER MICHAEL, *by Mary Stewart*** (Mill-Morrow, $3.95)

Exciting action, warm love story, splendid evocation of new and old Delphi, by possibly the foremost current teller of romance-adventures. And don't miss her NINE COACHES WAITING (1959; Crest, 50¢).

★★★★ **GIVE THE BOYS A GREAT BIG HAND, *by Ed McBain***
(Simon & Schuster, $2.95)

Bits of a severed corpse perplex the 87th Precinct squad, as we observe vivid details of their lives and many other lives in The City. The equally good 'TIL DEATH (1959) is now in Permabooks (35¢).

So many 4-star books crowd out some solid 3-star entries. But there must be at least brief listing of interesting novels by names new to the suspense field: Francis Hobson's DEATH ON A BACK BENCH (Harper, $2.95), Elizabeth Shenkin's MIDSUMMER'S NIGHTMARE (Rinehart, $2.95), Jerrard Tickell's THE HUNT FOR RICHARD THORPE (Doubleday, $3.75) and John Holbrook Vance's THE MAN IN THE CAGE (Random, $2.95).

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **STEPHEN BARR**

TITLE: ***Cui Bono***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: England

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *The tale of two old gentlemen, both in their seventies, and what they meant to each other, especially in the sunset of their lives . . .*

THE TWO OLD GENTLEMEN—THEY were not related, but they looked very alike—raised their cut-glass goblets in a toast.

"To the Tenth of August!" said one—he was perhaps slightly the older. "And to you, my dear Charles!"

"Forty years!" said the other. "It has been a good life, my dear Jeremy." He looked around the little room, at the oak sideboard, at the Adam fireplace with the oval framed portrait over it, at the *toile de Jouy* curtains through which one saw the rosebushes and the mulberry tree.

"That was a worthy dinner, Jeremy," went on the younger—but he could not have been less than seventy-five. "There is not a chef, I venture to say, who is your equal with a woodcock!"

The other blushed at the compliment—as he always did. "But the salad dressing, Charles!" he said. He never neglected to praise the salad dressing—it was Charles's one ineffable skill. "No one but you has the touch, and how beautiful the table looks!"

"Thank you, Jeremy. I polished the silver again this morning, whilst you were at market. I think we shall have to get the girl in this week. I am not up to the heavy cleaning any more." He sighed. "But I dread the intrusion."

"Ah, yes, Charles. We suit each other. We do not want anyone upsetting things in our little nest. Do you remember that dreadful cook? And her notion of a cream sauce?"

"Quite dreadful. I remember I was afraid to give her notice—I had to leave it to you."

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Jeremy nodded and pushed across the decanter. "A little more port, Charles? But that time when they were going to widen the road and cut off part of our little garden — you were the one who faced up to the commissioner."

"It was either that, Jeremy, or lose our mulberry tree. We have managed to keep things exactly the way we want them in spite of a changing world. I expect we are the only house in the village that still lights by oil and candle. And that horrible wireless! Frankly, I should be afraid to touch it!"

"I only stopped to listen to a wireless once," Jeremy said, "when I went to the wine merchants. I wish them joy of it. Some sort of drama, I believe, but I didn't tarry long."

"You know," Charles said, taking a morsel of Stilton, "it reminds me of how, when I had not come to know you, I was afraid you would grow weary of living in the country—so far from the diversions and entertainments of London. I was afraid you would miss going to the theatre."

"I despise the theatre, my dear Charles."

"Ah, but I did not know that then, my dear Jeremy. I lived in dread of the day when you would leave. I knew you well enough to recognize a conformity of tastes in other respects. Why, even in books —and by the bye, whose turn is it to-night?"

"Yours, I believe. You have a fine reading voice, Charles. Let me see, now: we finished *The Newcomes* last night, so which shall it be?"

"What do you say to *Cranford?* We have not had that recently."

"Capital, Charles, capital! I never tire of it."

"Good. Come to think of it though, *I* was reading last night, was I not?"

"No, indeed, my dear fellow. I remember distinctly that I had to move my chair—I was too far away from the lamp."

"Bur surely, Jeremy, that was the night before?"

"Perhaps you are right. It is no moment. I shall be honored to read."

"You are always so tactful, Jeremy. I think it was your tact that endeared you to me, even more than our agreement in everything. Why even in the matter of a soft-boiled egg—two and three-quarters of a minute!"

"To the dot, Charles, to the dot. And in wine—a sound port, or a well-rounded Burgundy. Faugh to white wines! Except—"

"Except hock," said Charles. "Hock—well iced—with turbot. When do we have turbot again, Jeremy?"

"The fishmonger said he expected some in to-morrow, Charles. I must remember to put a bottle of the Berncastler on ice. Shall we read now?"

Charles nodded with a smile and

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picked up the decanter and glasses. They rose and went into the study. Jeremy lighted the lamp, and looked at the easy chair, shaking his head. Charles went to the shelves and came back with an old book, bound in Russia leather.

"You know," Jeremy said, almost as if to himself, "I could have *sworn* it was last night you moved the chair . . ."

"Perhaps it was, my dear fellow, perhaps it was. But I shall read with the utmost pleasure."

"Ah, Charles, you pamper me!"

"We pamper one another, Jeremy." Charles sat in the easy chair and opened the book. Then he laid it down on his knees and took off his steel-rimmed spectacles. "Forty years . . ." he said again, and his eyes went to a gold-framed photograph on the mantelpiece. It was of a youngish man in Edwardian clothes. He bore a faint resemblance to Charles, but he had a more dashing air. "Just to think," Charles went on, "I was sitting in this very chair—on the Day!"

Jeremy smiled. "So you were," he said. "So you were; and I stood here." He went to the fireplace and turned. "I shall never forget how surprised you looked!" He began to laugh and Charles joined in. "I remember when I showed you the letter," Jeremy went on, "you said, 'Bless my soul! I thought I had burned it!'"

They both laughed heartily at the recollection.

"Ah, had I but known!" Charles said, wiping his eyes. "If some presentiment had told me of the happy outcome of that careless omission! Why, my first emotion was one of self-reproach! But you were so tactful, Jeremy."

"I'm glad to think that, Charles."

Both old gentlemen glanced up at the framed photograph, and Jeremy shook his head. "I often wonder how he fared," he said. "In the primeval forest . . . I should not care, myself, for Africa."

"And he," replied Charles, "could never abide England. Bertram has always been the adventurous sort. We were not unfair to him, were we, Jeremy?"

"Not a bit of it. He would have been restless in this place. It might have been made for *us,* though." Jeremy winked at Charles, and Charles winked back. "Besides, what Bertram does not know cannot hurt him, can it?"

"No, Jeremy. And when Cousin John bequeathed this place to Bertram, he did not know how unsuitable the choice was! He did not realize that the younger brother—myself, in fact—was the right man to enjoy and relish this little property. If Bertram had assumed ownership he would have sold it up and taken the money to Monte Carlo and lost it! And then gone to Africa! I think what we have done, Jeremy, has been a moral act. I truly think so."

Jeremy nodded in emphatic

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agreement. "But I must admit," he said, "that I was not quite sure what you would do when I showed you the letter. I found it in a copy of Horace that you had been reading in bed, you know."

"Very careless of me, Jeremy. But at that time I did not realize you were such a great reader."

"I used to take books from this room into the kitchen, Charles," the older one said. "It would not have been correct to ask you . . ."

"Tact," said the younger. "Always your strong point, Jeremy. Indeed, when you showed me the letter I could not imagine at first what you were driving at. Let me see: how did you put it?"

"Why, I believe I said, 'I found this, Sir, and I took the liberty of reading it. I am happy at the news that your brother was not, as everyone thinks, eaten by a lion.'"

"Were you calling me 'Sir' in those days?"

"Oh, yes. And I continued to for very nearly a year afterwards."

"Ah, Jeremy, what sensitiveness! What a delicacy of feeling! Then what did *I* say?"

"You said, 'Thank you very much, Jeremy. That will be all for to-night.'"

"Ah, yes. And then you said, 'Not quite, Charles—'"

"'Not quite, *Sir*.'"

"Of course: 'Not quite, Sir. I was wondering if I might move my things to the guest room—the servant's quarters are a bit draughty, Sir.' Tell me, Jeremy, how did I look when you said that?"

"You blinked, Charles."

"Come now, my dear fellow, I never blink."

"You did then. Finally you said, 'Why should I let you?' and I said, 'Well, Sir, I should like to occupy the guest room, and you would like to continue to occupy the master's bedroom—but will that be possible if Mister Bertram is informed of the bequest?'"

"So you did, so you did, Ah, me, I was a little indignant at first was I not? I said, 'And am I supposed to take up your duties as well as give up the guest room?' And you said, 'Well, I should not dream of your doing the cooking, Sir. I shall never allow anyone but myself to cook for us.'" Charles wagged his head with satisfaction. "And a good thing, too. I admired your straightforwardness, Jeremy."

"But I'm afraid you were not pleased, my dear Charles."

"That came later—when I had had time to think things over. At first, I tried to contrive some way of getting around you; but it would have meant your leaving me, and I soon came to realize I did not want that. In fact, with the change in your status here, you became more truly a companion, Jeremy. A boon companion—and your wonderful cooking! Savarin himself could not outcook my friend Jeremy!"

The older man blushed again.

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"But there is also an art in setting a table," he said. "And you would win accolades for your beautiful flower arrangements! This little house is like a jewel—under your care. And you know where everything is."

Charles smiled—and in his eye was a minute spark, a tiny, secret glint. He paused for a moment, and said, "And how fine it was of you to come right out with the suggestion that we read aloud to one another—there is nothing I look forward to more! What do you say, since this is the Anniversary, to a drop of the Jubilee brandy, eh?"

"Capital, Charles! I shall fetch it directly."

"No, no, my dear fellow: allow *me* to. I insist!"

The slightly younger—was he perhaps only seventy-four?—got up, and in a few moments returned with a crusted bottle and two pear-shaped glasses. They toasted one another and Charles said, "We have talked so long it is getting a little late. I am tired, my old friend—what do you say we forego the reading for to-night?"

"My very sentiments, dear Charles. I, too, am tired. So, good night to you, Charles."

"Good night—we shall read to-morrow."

Jeremy blew out the lamp and they went upstairs—each to his cozy bedroom.

When Charles had closed his door he stood for a moment in thought. You are right, old friend—he said to himself—you are indeed right: I know where everything is in this house.

He went to the wall where another photograph of his older brother hung. This one was a sepia print and it showed Bertram in hunting costume, with a Transvaal hat turned up at the side, and an elephant rifle in his hand.

Charles stood looking at it for a moment. Odd of me—he said to himself—how I cannot bear to throw away mementos!

He took it down and opened the back. Lying disclosed before him was a yellowed clipping from a Bloomfontein newspaper, dated thirty-eight years before. It told of the unfortunate death of the Englishman who, two years earlier, had escaped from a lion and now had succumbed to a rare tropical fever.

"This you must never see, my dear Jeremy," said Charles in a whisper. "Whatever would have happened to us if you had learned that your blackmail was unfounded? Whatever would have happened to *me?*"

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **MELVILLE DAVISSON POST**

TITLE: ***The Instrument of Darkness***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Uncle Abner

LOCALE: Old Virginia

TIME: In Jeffersonian days

COMMENTS: *The two brothers, one good and one evil, played chess for a great stake—and part of that stake was a beautiful slave girl; but, as always, Uncle Abner became the instrument of the "Providence of God."*

"ISN'T SHE A BEAUTY—EH, RANdolph?"

Vespatian Flornoy had a tumbler of French brandy. He sucked in a mouthful. Then he put it on the table.

The house was the strangest in Virginia. It was of some foreign model. The whole second floor on the side lying toward the east was in two spacious chambers lighted with great casement windows to the ceiling. Outside, on this brilliant morning, the world was yellow and dried-up, sere and baked. But the sun was thin and the autumn air hard and vital.

My uncle, Squire Randolph, the old country doctor, Storm, and the host, Vespatian Flornoy were in one of these enormous rooms. They sat about a table, a long mahogany piece made in England and brought over in a sailing ship.

There were a squat bottle of French brandy and some tumblers. Flornoy drank and recovered his spirit of abandon.

Now he leered at Randolph, and at the girl he had just called in.

He was a man one would have traveled far to see—yesterday or the day ahead of that. He had a figure out of Athens, a face east in

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some forgotten foundry by the Arno, thick-curled mahogany-colored hair, and eyes like the velvet hull on an Italian chestnut. These excellencies the heavenly workman had turned out, and now by some sorcery of the pit they were changed into abominations.

Hell charms, one thought of, when one looked the creature in the face. Drops of some potent liquor, and devil words had done it, on yesterday or the day ahead of yesterday. Surely not the things that really had done it—time and the iniquities of Gomorrah. His stock and his fine ruffled shirt were soiled. His satin waistcoat was stained with liquor.

"A daughter of a French marquis, eh!" he went on. "Sold into slavery by a jest of the gods—stolen out of the garden of a convent! It's the fabled history of every octoroon in New Orleans!"

Fabled or not the girl might have been the thing he said. The contour of the face came to a point at the chin and the skin was a soft Oriental olive. She was the perfect expression of a type. One never could wish to change a line of her figure or a feature of her face.

She stood now in the room before the door in the morning sun, in the quaint, alluring costume of a young girl of the time—a young girl of degree, stolen out of the garden of a convent! She had entered at Flornoy's drunken call, with the aspect of terror on her.

The man went on in his thick, abominable voice. "My brother Sheppard, coming north to an inspection of our joint estate, presents her as his adopted daughter. But when he dropped dead in this room last night and I went about the preparation of his body for your inquisition—eh, what, my gentlemen! I find a bill of sale running back ten years for the dainty baggage!

"French, and noble, stolen from the garden of a convent, perhaps! Perhaps!—but not by my brother Sheppard. His adopted daughter—sentimentally, perhaps. But legally a piece of property, I think, descending to his heirs. Eh, Randolph!"

And he thrust a folded yellow paper across the table.

Thé Justice put down his glass with the almost untasted liquor in it and examined the bill of sale.

"It is in form," he said. "And you interpret it correctly, Flornoy, by the law's letter. But you will not wish to enforce it, I imagine!"

"And why not, Randolph?" cried the man.

The Justice looked him firmly in the face.

"You take enough by chance, sir." You and your brother Sheppard held the estate jointly at your father's death, and now at your brother's death you hold it as sole heir. You will not wish, also, to hold his adopted daughter?"

Then he added, "This bill of sale

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would hold in the courts against any unindentured purpose, not accompanied by an intention expressed in some overt act. It would also fix the status of the girl against any pretended or legendary exemption of birth. The judges might believe that your brother Sheppard was convinced of this pretension when he rescued the child by purchase, and made his informal adoption at a tender age. But they would hold the paper, like a deed, irrevocable, and not to be disturbed by this conjecture."

"It will hold," cried the man, "and I will hold! You make an easy disclaimer of the rights of other men."

Then his face took on the aspect of a satyr's.

"Give her up, eh! To be a lady! Why, Randolph, I would have given Sheppard five hundred golden eagles for this little beauty —five hundred golden eagles in his hand! Look at her, Randolph. You are not too old to forget the points—the trim ankle, the slender body, the snap of a thoroughbred. There's the blood of the French marquis, on my honor!"

And he laughed, snapping his fingers at his wit.

"It only makes the noble lady merchandise! And perhaps, as you say, perhaps it isn't there, in fact. Egad, old man, I would have bid a thousand eagles if Sheppard had put her up. A thousand eagles!—and now I get her for nothing! He falls dead in my house and I take her by inheritance."

It was the living truth. The two men, Vespatian Flornoy and his brother Sheppard, took their father's estate jointly at his death. They were unmarried, and now at the death of Sheppard, the surviving brother Vespatian was sole heir, under the law, to the dead man's properties: houses and lands and slaves. The bill of sale made the girl an item in the inventory of the dead man's estate, to descend with the manor-house and lands.

The thing had happened—as fortune is predisposed to change, in a moment, as by the turning of dice.

At daybreak on this morning Vespatian Flornoy had sent a Negro at a gallop to summon the old country doctor, Storm, Squire Randolph, and my Uncle Abner. At midnight, in this chamber where they now sat, Sheppard as he got on his feet, with his candle, fell and died, Vespatian said, before he could reach his body. He lay now shaven and clothed for burial in the great chamber that adjoined.

Old Storm had stripped the body and found no mark. The man was dead with no scratch or bruise.

He could not say what vital organ had suddenly played out—perhaps a string of the heart had snapped. At any rate, the dead man had not gone out by any sort of

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violence, nor by any poison. Every drug or herb that killed left its stamp and superscription, old Storm said, and one could see it, if one had the eye, as one could see the slash of a knife or the bruise of an assassin's fingers.

It was plain death "by the Providence of God"—that was Randolph's verdict. So the Justice and old Storm summed up the thing and they represented the inquiry and the requirements of the law.

My Uncle Abner made no comment on this conclusion. He came and looked and was silent. He demurred to the "Providence of God" in Randolph's verdict, with a great gesture of rejection. He disliked this term in any human horror. "By the abandonment of God," he said, these verdicts ought rather to be written. But he gave no sign that his objection was of any special tenor. He seemed profoundly puzzled.

When the girl came in, at Vespatian's command, he continued silent. At the man's speech, and evident intent, his features and his great jaw hardened, as though under the sunburned skin the bony structure of the face were metal.

He sat in his chair, a little way out beyond the table, as he sat on a Sunday before the pulpit, on a bench, motionless, in some deep concern.

Randolph and Vespatian Flornoy were in this dialogue. Old Storm sat with his arms folded across his chest, his head down. His interest in the matter had departed with his inspection of the dead man, or remained in the adjoining chamber where the body lay, the eyelids closed forever on the land of living men, shut up tight like the shutters of a window in a house of mystery. He only glanced at the girl with no interest, as at a bauble.

And now while the dialogue went on and Dr. Storm looked down his nose, the girl, silent and in terror, appealed to my uncle in a furtive glance, swift, charged with horror and like a flash of shadow. The great table had a broad board connecting the carved legs beneath, a sort of shelf raised a little from the floor. In her glance, swift and fearful, she directed my uncle's attention to this board.

It was a long piece of veneered mahogany, making a shelf down the whole length of the table. On it my uncle saw a big folded cloth of squares white and black, and a set of huge ivory chessmen. The cloth was made to spread across the top of the table, and the chessmen were of unusual size in proportion to the squares; the round knobs on the heads of the pawns were as big as marbles. Beside these things was a rosewood box for dueling pistols, after the fashion of the time.

My uncle stooped over, took up these articles, and set them on the table.

"And so, Flornoy," he said, "you

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played at chess with your brother Sheppard."

The man turned swiftly; then he paused and drank his glass of liquor.

"I entertained my brother," he said, "as I could. There is no coffee-house to enter, nor any dancing women to please the eye, in the mountains of Virginia."

"For what stake?" said my uncle.

"I have forgotten, Abner," replied the man, "—some trifle."

"And who won?" said my uncle.

"I won," replied the man. He spoke promptly.

"You won," said my uncle, "and you remember that; but what you won, you have forgotten! Reflect a little on it, Flornoy."

The man cursed, his face in anger.

"Does it matter, Abner, a thing great or small? It is all mine today!"

"But it was not all yours last night," said my uncle.

"What I won was mine," replied the man.

"Now, there," replied my uncle, "lies a point that I would amplify. One might win, but might not receive the thing one played for. One might claim it for one's own, and the loser might deny it. If the stake were great, the loser might undertake to repudiate the bargain. And how would one enforce it?"

The man put down his glass, leaned over, and looked steadily at my uncle.

Abner slipped the silver hooks on the rosewood box, slowly, with his thumb and finger.

"I think," he said, "that if the gentleman you have in mind won and were met with a refusal, he would undertake to enforce his claim, not in the courts or by any legal writ, but by the methods which gentlemen such as you have in mind are accustomed to invoke."

He opened the box and took out two pistols of the time. Then his face clouded with perplexity. Both weapons were clean and loaded.

The man, propping his wonderful face in the hollow of his hand, laughed. He had the face and the laughter of the angels cast out with Satan, when in a moment of some gain over the hosts of Michael they forgot the pit.

"Abner," he cried, "you are hag-ridden by a habit, and it leads you into the wildest fancies!"

His laughter chuckled and gurgled in his throat.

"Let me put your theory together. It is a very pretty theory, lacking in some trifles, but spirited and packed with dramatic tension. Let me sketch it out as it stands before your eye . . . Have no fear, I shall not mar it by any delicate concern for the cunning villain, or any suppression of his evil nature. I shall uncover the base creature amid his deeds of darkness!"

He paused, and mocked the tragedy of actors.

"It is the hour of yawning grave-

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yards—midnight in this house. Vespatian Flornoy sits at this table with his good brother Sheppard. He has the covetousness of David, the son of Jesse, in his evil heart. He would possess the noble daughter of the Latin marquis, by a sardonic fate sold at childhood into slavery, but by the ever watchful Providence of God, for such cases made and provided, purchased by the good brother Sheppard and adopted for his daughter!

"Mark, Abner, how beautifully it falls into the formula of the tragic poets!

"The wicked Vespatian Flornoy, foiled in every scheme of purchase, moved by the instigation of the Devil, and with no fear of God before his eyes, plays at chess with his good brother Sheppard, wins his interest in the manor-house and lands, and his last gold piece—taunts and seduces him into a final game with everything staked against this Iphigenia. The evil one rises invisible but sulphurous to Vespatian's aid. He wins. In terror, appalled, aghast at the realization of his folly, the good brother Sheppard repudiates the bargain. They duel across the table, and Vespatian, being the better shot, killed his good brother Sheppard!

"Why, Abner, it is the plan of the 'Poetics.' It lacks no element of completeness. It is joined and fitted for the diction of Euripides!"

The man declaimed, his wonderful fouled face, his Adonis head with its thick curled hair, virile and spirited with the liquor and the momentum of his words. Old Storm gave no attention. Randolph listened as to the periods of an oration. And my uncle sat, puzzled, before the articles on the table. The girl now and then, when the speaker's eyes were on my uncle, by slight indicatory signs affirmed the speech, and continued strongly to indicate the chessmen.

My uncle began to turn the pieces over under the protection of his hand, idly, like one who fingers about a table in abstraction. Presently he stopped and covered one of the pieces with his hand. It was a pawn, large, like the other chessmen, but the round ivory knob at the top of it was gone. Sawed off!

The man Flornoy, consumed with his idea, failed to mark the incident, and moved by the tenor of his speech, went on. "This is the Greek plan for a tragedy. It is the plan of Athens in the fifth century. It is the plan of Sophocles and Aeschylus. Mark how it turns upon the Hellenic idea of a dominating Fate—a Fate in control over the affairs of men, pagan and not good. The innocent and virtuous have no gain above the shrewd and wicked. The good Sheppard dies and the evil Vespatian takes his daughter, his goods and lands to enjoy in a gilded life, long and happy!"

He thought the deep reflection in my uncle's face was confusion at his wit.

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"That ending would not please you, Abner. Luther and Calvin and John Wesley have lived after Aristotle assembled this formula in his 'Poetics.' And they will have the evil punished—a dagger in the wicked Vespatian's heart, and the virgin slave, by the interposition of the will of Heaven, preserved in her virginity. And so you come, like the Providence of God, to set the thing in order!"

My uncle looked up at the man, his hand covering the mutilated pawn, his face calm in reflection.

"You quote the tragic poets with much pedantry," he said. "Well, I will quote them too: 'Ofttimes, to win us to our harm, the instruments of darkness tell us truth!' How much truth, in all this discourse, have you told us?"

"Now, Abner," cried the man, "if it is truth you seek, and not the imaginations of a theory, how much could there be in it? If it were not for the granite ledges of reality, one might blow iris-colored bubbles of the fancy and watch them, in their beauty, journey to the stars! But alas, they collide with the hard edges of a fact and puff out. To begin with, the pistols have not been fired!"

"One could reload a pistol," replied my uncle.

"But one could not shoot a man, Abner, and leave no mark of the bullet on his body!"

He paused and addressed the old doctor.

"I sent for Storm, when I sent for Randolph, to rid me of every innuendo of a gossip. Ask him if there is a mark of violence on my brother's body."

The old man lifted his lined, withered face.

"There is no mark on him," the doctor said.

Vespatian Flornoy leaned across the table.

"Are you sure?" he said. "Perhaps you might be mistaken."

The words were in the taunting note of Elijah to the priests of Baal.

The old man made a decisive gesture. *"Voilà!"* he said, "I have handled a thousand dead men! I am not mistaken."

Vespatian Flornoy put up his hands as in a great, hopeless gesture.

"Alas, Abner," he said, "we must give up this pretty theory. It does honor to your creative instinct, and save for this trifle we might commend it to all men. But you see, Abner, Doctor Storm and the world will unreasonably insist that a bullet leaves a mark. I do not think we can persuade them against their experience in that belief. I am sorry for you, Abner. You have a reputation in Virginia to keep up. Let us think; perhaps there is a way around this disconcerting fact."

And he put his extended palm across his forehead in mock reflection.

It was at this moment, when for an instant the man's face was covered, that the girl standing before

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the door made a strange indicatory signal to my Uncle Abner.

Vespatian Flornoy, removing his hand, caught a glimpse of the girl's after-expression. And he burst out in a great laugh, striking the table with his clenched hand.

"Egad!" he cried. "By the soul of Satan! The coy little baggage is winking at Abner!"

He saw only the final composition of the girl's face. He did not see the stress and vigor of the indicatory sign. He roared in a pretension of jealous anger.

"I will not have my property ogle another in my house. You shall answer for this, Abner, on the field of honor. And I warn you, sir: I have the surest eye and the steadiest hand in the mountains of Virginia."

It was the truth. The man was the wonder of the countryside. He could cut a string with a pistol at ten paces; he could drive in a carpet tack with his bullet, across a room. With the weapon of the time, the creature was sure, accurate to a hair, and deadly.

"No man," he cried, "shall carry off this dainty baggage. Select your weapon, Abner—let us duel over this seduction!"

He spoke in the flippancies of jest. But my uncle's face was now alight with some great comprehensive purpose. It was like the face of one who begins to see the bulk and outlines of a thing that before this hour, in spite of every scrutiny, was formless.

And to Flornoy's surprise and wonder my uncle put out his hand, took up one of the pistols, and suddenly fired it into the wood of the mantelpiece beyond the table. He got up and looked at the mark. The bullet was hardly bedded in the veneer.

"You use a light charge of powder, Flornoy," said my uncle.

The man was puzzled at this act, but he answered at once.

"Abner," he said, "that is a secret I have learned. A pistol pivots on the grip. In firing, there are two things to avoid: a jerk on the trigger and the tendency of the muzzle to jump up, caused by the recoil of the charge. No man can control his weapon with a heavy charge of powder behind the bullet. If one would shoot true to a hair, one must load light."

It seemed a considerable explanation. And not one of the men who heard it ever knew whether it was, in fact, the controlling cause, or whether another and more subtle thing had inspired it.

"But, Flornoy," said my uncle, "if to kill were the object of a duelist, such a charge of powder might defeat the purpose."

"You are mistaken, Abner," he said. "The body of a man is soft. If one avoids the bony structure, a trifling charge of powder will carry one's bullet into a vital organ. There is no gain in shooting through a man as though one were going to string him on a thread.

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Powder enough to lodge the bullet in the vital organ is sufficient."

"There might be a point in not shooting through him," said Abner.

The man looked calmly at my uncle; then he made an irrelevant gesture.

"No object, Abner, but no use. The whole point is to shoot to a hair, to lodge the bullet precisely in the point selected. Look how a light charge of powder does it."

And taking up the other pistol, he steadied it a moment in his hand, then fired at Abner's bullet hole. No other mark appeared on the mantel board. One would have believed that the bullet, if the barrel held one, had wholly vanished. But when they looked closely, it was seen that my uncle's bullet, struck precisely, was driven a little deeper into the wood. It was amazing accuracy. No wonder the man's skill was a byword in the land.

My uncle made a single comment.

"You shoot like the slingers of Benjamin!" he said.

Then he came back to the table and stood looking down at the man. He held the mutilated ivory pawn in his closed left hand. The girl, like an appraised article, was in the doorway; Storm and Randolph looked on, like men before the blind moving of events.

"Flornoy," said Abner, "you have told us more truth than you intended. How did your brother Sheppard die?"

The man's face changed. His fingers tightened on the pistol. His eyes became determined and alert.

"Damme, man," he cried, "do you return to that! Sheppard fell and died, where you stand, beside the table in this room. I am no surgeon to say what disorder killed him. I sent for Storm to determine that."

My uncle turned to the old eccentric doctor.

"Storm" he said, "how did Sheppard Flornoy die?"

The old man shrugged and put out his nervous hands.

"I do not know," he said, "the heart, maybe. There is no mark on him."

And here Randolph interrupted.

"Abner," he said, "you put a question that no man can answer: something snaps within the body, and we die. We have no hint at the cause of Sheppard's death.

"Why, yes," replied my uncle, "I think we have."

"What hint?" said Randolph.

"The hint," said Abner, "that the eloquent Vespatian gave us just now in his discourse. I think he set out the cause in his apt recollection from the Book of Samuel."

He paused and looked down at the man.

Vespatian Flornoy got on his feet. His face and manner changed. There was now decision and menace in his voice.

"Abner," he said, "there shall be an end to this. I have turned your

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ugly hint with pleasantry and met it squarely with indisputable facts. I shall not go any further on this way. I shall clear myself now, after the manner of a gentleman."

My uncle looked steadily at the man.

"Flornoy," he said, "if you would test your innocence by a device of the Middle Ages, I would suggest a simpler and swifter method of that time. Wager of battle is outlawed in Virginia. It is prohibited by statute, and we cannot use it. But the test I offer in its place is equally medieval. It is based on the same belief, old and persistent, that the Providence of God will indicate the guilty. And it is not against the law."

He paused.

"The same generation of men who believed in Wager of Battle, in the Morsel of Execration, in the red-hot plowshares, as a test of the guilt of murder, also believed that if the assassin touched his victim, the body of the murdered man would bleed!

"Flornoy," he said, "if you would have recourse to one of those medieval devices, let it be the last. . . . Go in with me and touch the body of your brother Sheppard and I give you my word of honor that I will accept the decision of the test."

It was impossible to believe that my Uncle Abner trifled, and yet the thing was beyond the soundings of all sense.

Storm and Randolph, and even the girl standing in the door, regarded him in wonder.

Vespatian Flornoy was amazed.

"Damme, man!" he cried, "superstitions have unhinged your mind. Would you believe in a thing like that?"

"I would rather believe it," replied my uncle, "than to believe that in a duel God would direct the assassin's bullet."

Then he added, with weight and decision in his voice. "If you would be clear of my suspicion, if you would be free to take and enjoy the lands and properties that you inherit, go in before these witnesses and touch the dead body of your brother Sheppard. There is no mark appearing on him. Storm has found no wound to bleed. You are innocent of any measure in his death, you tell us. There's no peril to you, and I shall ride away to assure every man that Sheppard Flornoy died, as Randolph has written, by the 'Providence of God.'"

He extended his arm toward the adjacent chamber, and across the table he looked Flornoy in the face.

"Go in before us and touch the dead man!"

"By the soul of Satan," cried the man, "if you hang on such a piece of foolery, you shall have it. The curse of superstition sticks in your fleece, Abner, like a burr."

He turned and flung open the door behind him and went in. The others followed—Storm and Ran-

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dolph behind the man, the girl, shaken and fearful, and my Uncle Abner.

Sheppard Flornoy lay prepared for burial in the center of the room. The morning sun entering through the long windows flooded him with light; his features were sharply outlined in the mask of death, his eyelids closed.

They stood about the dead man, at peace in this glorious shroud of sun, and the living brother was about to touch him when my uncle put out his hand.

"Flornoy," he said, "the dead man ought to see who comes to touch him. I will open his eyes."

And at the words, for no cause or reason conceivable to the men looking on, Vespatian Flornoy shouted with an oath and ran in on my uncle.

He was big and mad with terror. But even in his youth and fury he was not a match for my Uncle Abner. Liquor and excess failed before wind and sun and the clean life of the hills. The man went down under my uncle's clenched hand, like an ox polled with a hammer.

It was Randolph who cried out, while the others crowded around the dead man and his brother unconscious on the floor.

"Abner, Abner," he said, "what is the answer to this ghastly riddle?"

For reply my uncle drew back the eyelids of the dead man. And stooping over, Randolph and old Storm saw that Sheppard Flornoy had been shot through the eye, and that the head of the ivory pawn had been forced into the bullet hole to round out the damaged eyeball under the closed lid.

The girl sobbed, clinging to my uncle's arm. Randolph tore the bill of sale into indistinguishable bits. And old Doctor Storm made a great gesture with his hands extended and crooked.

"Mon Dieu!" he cried, in a consuming revulsion of disgust. "My father was surgeon in the field for Napoleon, I was raised with dead men, and a drunken assassin fools me in the mountains of Virginia!"

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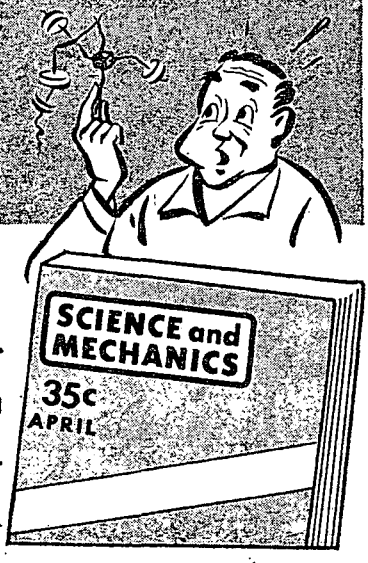

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DEATH IN GUATEMALA

by FRANCES CRANE

IT WAS EVELYN PROCTOR'S IDEA. Charles, she said, let's take Ada Peevyhouse with us this trip. Charlie Proctor asked who the devil was Ada Peevyhouse. Why, don't you remember, dear? She was one of my maids of honor when I was Miss Magnolia. That had been, Charlie thought but never said, twenty years ago. Miss Magnolia had been very beautiful. Charlie had plummeted for her sparkling blue eyes, rosy little mouth, and curly brown hair. At thirty-eight Miss Magnolia had put on considerable weight but she was still beautiful and Charlie was content. They were ideally suited to one another because Charlie loved to make money and Evelyn adored spending it.

"The poor thing has never been anywhere, Charles. She supports her old mother. Teaches sixth grade. Always will. She's as thin as a slat. Homely. Nose too long. Mouth too big. Hair in a bun. Nice brown eyes and that's all. This will be a break for poor Ada."

For me, too, Charlie thought. His reason for visiting Guatemala was to invest. He was forty-five, one of those square-faced short-nosed blond Americans who age so agreeably. He was stocky but not paunchy, self-made, rich, and retired.

To fill in his time he invested or sought ways to invest. Evelyn shopped. When outside her own country she went into perfect frenzies of shopping and their home, especially the attic and basement, was crammed with things she expected to have some use for some day.

The truth was, Evelyn hoarded. Nobody called it that. There was plenty of money, so why not? Charlie disliked shopping with his wife, so having the old-maid teacher along meant that he would be free to delve unhampered into oil, timber, and coffee in Guatemala.

Before their departure, Evelyn shopped, got fitted and permed, read up on what to wear at this season in Guatemala and what to

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buy there. The girls gave her going-away parties. She called the party-givers her p.g.'s—pronounced peegees. She kept a list of the peegees and promised to bring them gifts of woven cotton, for which Guatamala is famous. Evelyn always made the peegees her excuse for high-powered buying in far places, but had she ferreted into herself, she would have found that the peegees were incidental: she simply loved buying and owning.

Miss Peevyhouse also shopped—in a little ready-to-wear place—and acquired a perky suit with a short narrow skirt, a blue cotton dress with frisky ruffles climbing from the hem into a sort of bustle, and her very first cocktail outfit, a black taffeta, also bustley, with a bolero. She went quite overboard and had her hair cut.

Evelyn was exhausted when they took off. She sank down by a window and told Ada to sit beside her and keep an eye on her minks. Charlie sat behind them looking at oil maps. Evelyn yanked the shade down. Ada saw nothing all the way to Mexico City. Evelyn said there was nothing to see and since Evelyn was a seasoned traveller, Ada knew she was right.

In the Mexican capital Evelyn over-ate and suffered that well-known malaise, and Ada was able to show her gratitude by waiting on her hand and foot.

In the Guatemala plane Evelyn again pulled the shade down and Ada, too timid to crane through other peoples' windows, missed seeing the famous Mexican volcanos. She didn't mind. She was too wonder-struck.

In Guatemala City there were more volcanos in view from the airport taxi, but Charlie was scrutinizing another map and Evelyn was saying she must rest up at once to be ready for tomorrow's markets. So Ada kept to herself the rapture inspired in her breast by the fairy-tale peaks.

At the hotel she unzipped Evelyn, helped her feel comfortable, and at last could go along to her own room. It was small, stuffy, and without a view, but there were flowers on the night-stand and a desk just as in the Proctors' deluxe suite.

Breathless, Ada showered, changed to the blue cotton dress, and set out to explore the hotel. It was lovely. Now and then the corridors widened into glass-roofed patios filled with tropical flowers. There was a gorgeous lounge and, one floor up, a roof garden. There, Ada saw many mountains rising from the plain around the city. Their beauty was fantastic, unreal. Tears filled her eyes. Oh, what wonder! How lucky she was! How many people ever had the privilege of seeing something like this? She felt humble, blessed, and she loved Evelyn.

Charlie spoke twice before she heard him. He was with two Texas

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oilmen. One was gray, the other pink. He introduced them.

"Hi, honey!" the pink one cried. "Peevyhouse? We can't have that. Ada? Now that's cute. Buy you a drink, Ada, honey?"

The gray oilman said, "As I was saying when interrupted, Charlie, we can charter a plane and wrap this little country up in two or three days."

Ada, blushing, went back downstairs, bought colored post cards at the porter's desk, and in a flowery nook wrote messages to her mother and her girl friends, all teachers like herself. She wrote out of a brimming heart. Believe it or not, this scene is even more breathtaking than in this picture. Wish you were here. Going back for stamps, she came on Evelyn at a table in the lounge drinking tea and eating sandwiches and cakes.

"Wherever have you been, Ada? I had to call a maid to help me dress. She had bare feet! They all have." She frowned. "My dear, that dress is *cotton*. This is their *winter* season." She gobbled a sandwich. "It's too short. The skirt is too tight. You really must watch that wiggle, Ada. You're not Marilyn Monroe, you know." She ate some more cake. "Why didn't you go to Neiman's? Even in their thrift departments the vendeuses have taste. I hate to speak about that raggedy haircut, but that style is for *girls*." Another sandwich. "Did you bring any of the clothes you usually wear?" Ada nodded. "Good. That dress and your suit are suggestive. *Their* men aren't like *ours*, you know."

Evelyn was so right. You've got a darling figure, honey, that salesgirl at the cheap shop had said. Skirts are short and tight. You've got the sweetest legs. Take a tip, dear. Don't be mad, but do get yourself a gamin haircut. Money in the bank, honey. Ada had studied up on geography, topography, Indian legends, and archeology including the Mayan ruins, and here she was, ignorant, not even knowing the proper thing to wear—or that *their* men were different.

They dined with the two oilmen at the American Club. Ada wore her black taffeta, and, as Evelyn advised, kept the jacket on. You've got darling shoulders, honey, that girl had said; but Evelyn whispered in Ada's ear that up to now she had supposed Ada wore falsies.

The gray oilman wolfed his food in order to have more time to talk about the oil business. The pink man loved to dance. Ada explained to suspicious Evelyn that the reason she knew the new steps, even the cha-cha, was because the teachers danced with the students in the gym and at evening school parties. After a sort of pavane around the room with his wife, Charlie wanted to learn the gay steps, too, but Evelyn said it was time to go to the hotel, what with the men taking off at five a.m. and a morning mar-

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ket ahead for herself. A night club, baby? the pink man murmured to Ada alone. She was shocked.

They made the first market while the vendors were still setting up stalls and laying out their wares. Ada wore a loose old blouse and an old skirt which hung straight down from the waist. Not a curve or wiggle could possibly show as she trailed after Evelyn and took charge of the newspaper-wrapped loot.

Evelyn haggled in one of her expensive outfits, including a costly hat and fifty-dollar shoes, which she planted in the market mire as she skillfully brought a $3 item down to $1.50.

She always settled for quantity, not quality. The battle itself was the thing. Hers was a tournament. Armed only with rudimentary market Spanish and an elemental knowledge of the Guatemalan currency, she made her jousts and tilts with gestures, grimaces, disdainful shrugs, and pretended walking-aways, which eventually mowed the very toughest down.

She bought goods. Yard goods. Tablecloths. Lunch cloths. Napkins. Masks? Too ugly. Baskets? Better in Mexico. Flowers? Ada suggested once. What for?

The markets closed for the siesta. As soon as they were open again, Evelyn was back. They dined evenings as they were and afterward, in the Proctors' sitting-room, Evelyn gloated over her purchases.

The little country wrapped up, Charlie came back and for a wonder made no objection to accompanying them in a rented car to the famous Sunday market at Chicastenango. He had seen colorful Lake Atitlan from the air and though scenery is corny he wanted to see that lake close up. On the way to the great Sunday market they would spend Saturday night by the lake.

They arrived near sundown at a hotel directly on the lake. Evelyn retired at once, had her dinner set up on a tray, and had Ada close the French doors on the balcony and also the curtains to shut out the sheen of the water.

By the time Ada stepped onto her own balcony, twilight was almost at hand. The pearl-blue lake lay like a magic mirror within a fringe of purple volcanos. A crescent moon hung above one ancient crater. Her throat tightened. Tears ran down her cheeks. No matter what lies ahead, I've seen this. Who am I, that God has granted me this?

"Hey, there!" Charlie called from across an inlet. "Look out for that balcony—ours is shaky. Bridge is yonder. Restaurant's over here, Miss Ada." When she joined him, "This sure is some lake. Why don't you tell me about it, Miss Ada?"

Ada said that the lake was so deep it had never been plumbed, that the Indians were superstitious about it, and yes, a volcano did erupt now and then.

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At dinner she got to speak of some of the things she had studied up on, including facts about the town with the famous market. After dinner they had nightcaps on the hotel veranda. Didn't you bring that blue dress, Ada? Finally and reluctantly, Ada, honey, we got to turn in—two more hours and we've got to be on our way again to that damn market.

What a market! Pretty much the same things, but more of them. Oddly enough the savage-looking little Indian vendors usually spoke English, but they were combatants who called for every whit of Evelyn's boldness, prowess, ruthlessness, and guile.

Evelyn was magnificent. Ada was filled with awe. Charlie soon wandered off and found the Mayan Inn. If he could persuade Evelyn to lunch here—doubtful because she planned to be back in Guatemala City for the Monday morning market—it would mean another night by that mysterious lake. Just in case, he telephoned for the same rooms and was delighted when Evelyn proved amenable, because she was excited about something she'd bought, which she couldn't even whisper about because the Indians all around them had sharp ears. Ada was staying with it in the car. No, it couldn't be left unprotected. No, Ada couldn't come and have lunch with them. All right, Charles, send her a sandwich. If you insist. It really isn't necessary.

They were back in their room at the hotel before Evelyn shucked off the newspapers and Charlie got a look at the treasure. He gaped. It was pink, ugly as hell, and so heavy that Evelyn could barely hold it waist high. She stood framed by the French doors open on the pearl-blue lake, proud, victorious, radiant, smartly dressed in a navy silk suit and a flower-trimmed Lily Daché hat. Her blue eyes sparkled. Her rosy lips were curved in an angelic smile.

"*What is it?* Really, Charles! It's a Mayan sculpture. Nobody we know has one. You're forbidden to take them out of this country. But I'll manage. Come out on the balcony and see it before it's too dark."

It happened like that.

She was there and then she wasn't.

Her hat floated like a wreath on water, with not even a ripple or a bubble to show where she had gone in.

Ada blamed herself. She had discovered the treasure. She had told Evelyn it was taboo. So Evelyn had to have it. Charlie blamed himself. He hadn't warned his wife against their shaky balcony.

Was it premeditated? Or were the Indians right? The Indians knew about the treasure—Indians always know everything—and they knew that the American woman had been spirited into the lake because she had tried to own a Mayan god.

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Everything that Charlie's money could do about Evelyn was done. Drawn together by grief, guilt, love and admiration for Evelyn—and an increasing pleasure in each other's company—Charlie and Ada waited by the lake. Every morning there were fresh flowers in the local markets. The hotel had an excellent bar.

Another baby moon was cradled in that same old crater before Charlie admitted, only to himself, that Evelyn would never let her treasure go and so was forever in the lake. Charlie and Ada spoke often now of Evelyn's face those last moments, saying it was almost saintlike. Evelyn had been blissfully happy. So they shipped the yard goods, tablecloths, lunch cloths and napkins to the peegees, and they were happy.

Was it premeditated? Was it murder? Or were the Indians right?

"O"

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IN THE FOG (Conclusion)

by RICHARD HARDING DAVIS

What has happened so far: Four members of the exclusive Grill Club in London are having supper the evening after the great fog of 1897. One of the four, an honorary member, is an American who introduces himself as Lieutenant Ripley Sears, Naval Attaché to the Court of Russia. The attention of the four diners is directed to a fifth Club member who is sitting apart—Sir Andrew, an influential member of Parliament, scheduled to speak in the House of Commons that night in favor of the huge Navy Increase Bill.

Sir Andrew is about to leave for the House when the American begins to tell of a remarkable adventure he had during the previous evening's fog. Sir Andrew, who has a passion for mystery and detective stories, delays his departure and joins the group at the long table.

Lieutenant Sears relates how he became hopelessly lost the night before. After groping his way in the fog for some time he caught sight of an open doorway in a private house set well back from the street. As he headed for the dim light, a young man in evening clothes came out of the doorway and rushed past him.

Sears found the house apparently empty, except for a servant dressed in Russian livery who was fast asleep in the hallway. Sears roused him and learned that the lady of the house—the "Princess"—had been expecting a visitor. The servant mistook Sears for the expected man and went upstairs to announce "the Excellency's" arrival. While waiting in the silent, exotically furnished house, Sears discovered, behind a carved screen in an alcove, the body of a young man sitting at ease on a divan. But the young man was dead—murdered.

Investigating further, the American naval attaché found the Russian "Princess"—a beautiful woman—in another room. She was lying on the floor, also dead, and it was obvious to Sears that he had stumbled on a double murder, with both victims stabbed by the same weapon, and that the weapon was nowhere on the scene of the crime.

The servant reappeared, and after questioning revealed that the Princess had already had two visitors that evening—the Earl of Chetney, a recently returned African explorer, and his younger brother, Lord Arthur Chetney. Then in a sudden panic the servant fled, and in pursuing him Sears lost the house and was again swallowed up in the fog. When Sears finally got to the police, they were able to fill in some of the details. The Princess, so called, was a former Russian spy; the other victim of the double murder was evidently the Earl of Chetney; and the murderer was apparently the younger brother, Lord Arthur.

The motive was also clear: the un-

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expected return of the Earl from Africa (where he was supposed to have died) threatened the inheritance of the Chetney fortune by the younger son who had borrowed heavily against his prospects and was now unable to satisfy the heavy demands of his money lenders.

The police, under Inspector Lyle, searched for the house of tragedy but were unable to locate it. And that was as much as the American knew of the strange mystery. Sir Andrew, somewhat disappointed, is about to leave for the House again when the youngest member around the table announces that he, as one of the legal advisers of the Chetney family, can tell the sequel to Lieutenant Sears' story, once more delaying Sir Andrew's departure.

Lord Edam, father of the Chetney brothers, has been dying for the past three days. Inspector Lyle had gone to Chetney House to arrest Lord Arthur for the double murder, and while he was there he had received word that the Russian servant had been found.

At Scotland Yard the servant refused to talk, but that afternoon word came that Lord Arthur had been struck by a hansom cab in the fog and been taken to a hospital. Lyle, accompanied by the present narrator, went at once to the hospital where the Inspector charged Lord Arthur with double murder and informed him that he was under arrest. Lord Arthur vehemently denied his guilt, insisting that he left his brother alive and well at the Princess' house. Then Lord Arthur sprang from his cot, shouting: "I am going with you to that house! I can tell you who murdered my brother."

And now, the conclusion of IN THE FOG—

"' 'I can tell you who murdered my brother,' Lord Arthur shouted. 'That woman murdered him. She first ruined his life, and now she has killed him.

" 'For the last five years she has been plotting to make herself his wife, and last night, when he told her he had discovered the truth about the Russian and that she would never see him again, she flew into a passion and stabbed him, and then, in terror of the gallows, killed herself. She murdered him, I tell you, and I promise you that we will find the knife she used near her—perhaps still in her hand. What will you say to that?'

"Lyle turned his head away and stared down at the floor. 'I might say," he answered, 'that you placed it there.'

"Arthur gave a cry of anger and sprang at him, and then pitched forward into his arms. The blood was running from the cut under the bandage, and he had fainted. Lyle carried him back to the bed again, and we left him with the police and the doctors and drove at once to the address he had given us.

"We found the house not three minutes' walk from St. George's

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Hospital. It stands in Trevor Terrace, that little row of houses set back from Knightsbridge, with one end in Hill Street.

"As we left the hospital Lyle had said to me, 'You must not blame me for treating him as I did. All is fair in this work, and if by angering that boy I could have made him commit himself I was right in trying to do so; though, I assure you, no one would be better pleased than myself if I could prove his theory to be correct. But we cannot tell. Everything depends upon what we see for ourselves within the next few minutes.'

"When we reached the house, Lyle broke open the fastenings of one of the windows on the ground floor, and, hidden by the trees in the garden, we scrambled in.

"We found ourselves in the reception room which was the first room on the right of the hall. The gas was still burning behind the colored glass and red silk shades, and when the daylight streamed in after us it gave the hall a hideously dissipated look, like the foyer of a theatre at a matinée, or the entrance to an all-day gambling hell.

"The house was oppressively silent and because we knew why it was so silent we spoke in whispers. When Lyle turned the handle of the drawing-room door, I felt as though someone had put his hand upon my throat. But I followed close at his shoulder and saw, in the subdued light of many-tinted lamps, the body of Chetney at the foot of the divan, just as Lieutenant Sears had described it.

"In the drawing-room we found the body of the Princess Zichy, her arms thrown out, and the blood from her heart frozen in a tiny line across her bare shoulder. But neither of us, although we searched the floor on our hands and knees, could find the weapon which had killed her.

"'For Arthur's sake,' I said, 'I would have given a thousand pounds if we had found the knife in her hand, as he said we would.'

"'That we have not found it there,' Lyle answered, 'is to my mind the strongest proof that he is telling the truth, that he left the house before the murder took place. He is not a fool, and had he stabbed his brother and this woman, he would have seen that by placing the knife near her he could help to make it appear as if she had killed Chetney and then committed suicide. Besides, Lord Arthur insisted that the evidence in his behalf would be our finding the knife here. He would not have urged that if he knew we would *not* find it, if he knew he himself had carried it away. This is no suicide. A suicide does not rise and hide the weapon with which he kills himself, and then lie down again. No, this has been a double murder and we must look outside of the house for the murderer.'

"While he was speaking Lyle and

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I had been searching every corner, studying the details of each room. I was so afraid that, without telling me, he would make some deductions prejudicial to Arthur that I never left his side. I was determined to see everything that he saw and, if possible, to prevent his interpreting it in the wrong way.

"He finally finished his examination and we sat down together in the drawing-room, and he took out his notebook and read aloud all that Mr. Sears had told him of the murder and what we had just learned from Arthur. We compared the two accounts word for word, and weighed statement with statement, but I could not determine from anything Lyle said which of the two versions he had decided to believe.

"'We are trying to build a house of blocks,' he exclaimed. 'with half of the blocks missing. We have been considering two theories', he went on: 'one that Lord Arthur is responsible for both murders, and the other that the dead woman in there is responsible for one of them and then committed suicide; but until the Russian servant is ready to talk I shall refuse to believe in the guilt of either.'

"'What can you prove by him?' I asked. 'He was drunk and asleep. He saw nothing.'

"Lyle hesitated, and then, as though he had made up his mind to be quite frank with me, spoke freely.

"'I do not know that he was either drunk or asleep,' he answered. 'Lieutenant Sears describes him as a stupid boor. I am not satisfied that he is not a clever actor. What was his position in this house? What was his real duty here? Suppose it was not to guard this woman, but to watch her. Let us imagine that it was not the woman he served but a master, and see where that leads us. For this house has a master, a mysterious, absentee landlord, who lives in Saint Petersburg, the unknown Russian who came between Chetney and Zichy and because of whom Chetney left her. He is the man who bought this house for Madame Zichy, who sent these rugs and curtains from Saint Petersburg to furnish it for her after his own tastes, and, I believe, it was he also who placed the Russian servant here, ostensibly to serve the Princess but in reality to spy upon her. At Scotland Yard we do not know who this gentleman is; the Russian police confess to equal ignorance concerning him. When Lord Chetney went to Africa, Madame Zichy lived in Saint Petersburg; but there her receptions and dinners were so crowded with members of the nobility and of the army and diplomats that among so many visitors the police could not learn which was the one for whom she most greatly cared.'

"Lyle pointed at the modern French paintings and the heavy silk rugs hanging on the walls.

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"'The unknown is a man of taste and of some fortune,' he said, 'not the sort of man to send a stupid peasant to guard the woman he loves. So I am not content to believe, with Mr. Sears, that the servant is a boor. I believe him instead to be a very clever ruffian. I believe him to be the protector of his master's honor, or, let us say, of his master's property, whether that property be silver plate or the woman his master loves.

"'Last night, after Lord Arthur had gone away, the servant was left alone in this house with Lord Chetney and Madame Zichy. From where he sat in the hall he could hear Lord Chetney bidding her farewell; for, if my idea of him is correct, he understands English quite as well as you or I. Let us imagine that he heard her, reminding him of his former wish to marry her, and let us suppose that he hears Chetney denounce her and tell her that at Cairo he has learned of this Russian admirer—the servant's master.

"'He hears the woman declare that she has had no admirer but himself, that this unknown Russian was, and is, nothing to her, that there is no man she loves but him, and that she cannot live, knowing that he is alive, without his love. Suppose Chetney believed her; suppose his former infatuation for her returned and that in a moment of weakness he forgave her and took her in his arms. That is the moment the Russian master has feared. It is to guard against it that he has placed his watchdog over the Princess, and how do we know but that, when the moment came, the watchdog served his master, as he saw his duty, and killed them both? What do you think?' Lyle demanded. 'Would not that explain both murders?'

"I was only too willing to hear any theory which pointed to anyone else as the criminal than Arthur, but Lyle's explanation was too utterly fantastic. I told him that he could not hang a man for what he imagined he had done.

"'No,' Lyle answered, 'but I can frighten him by telling him what I think he has done, and now when I again question the Russian servant I will make it quite clear to him that I believe he is the murderer. I think that will open his mouth. A man will at least talk to defend himself. Come,' he said, 'we must return at once to Scotland Yard and see him. There is nothing more to do here.'

"He arose and I followed him into the hall, and in another minute we would have been on our way to Scotland Yard. But just as he opened the street door a postman halted at the gate of the garden and began fumbling with the latch.

"Lyle stopped, with an exclamation of chagrin.

"'How stupid of me!' he exclaimed. He turned quickly and pointed to a narrow slit cut in the

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brass plate of the front door. 'The house has a private letter-box,' he said, 'and I had not thought to look in it. If we had gone out as we came in, by the window, I would never have seen it. The moment I entered the house I should have thought of securing the letters which came this morning. I have been careless.'

"He stepped back into the hall and pulled at the lid of the letter-box, which hung on the inside of the door, but it was tightly locked. At the same moment the postman came up the steps holding a letter. Without a word Lyle took it from his hand and began to examine it. It was addressed to the Princess Zichy and on the back of the envelope was the name of a West End dressmaker.

"'That is of no use to me,' Lyle said. He took out his card and showed it to the postman. 'I am Inspector Lyle from Scotland Yard,' he said. 'The people in this house are under arrest. Everything it contains is now in my keeping. Did you deliver any other letters here this morning?'

"The man looked frightened, but answered promptly that he was now upon his third round. He had made one postal delivery at seven that morning and another at eleven.

"'How many letters did you leave here?' Lyle asked.

"'About six altogether,' the man answered.

"'Did you put them through the door into the letter-box?'

"The postman said, 'Yes, I always slip them into the box, then ring and go away. The servants collect them from the inside.'

"'Have you noticed if any of the letters you leave here bear a Russian postage stamp?' Lyle asked.

"The man answered, 'Oh, yes, sir, a great many.'

"'From the same person, would you say?'

"'The writing seems to be the same,' the man answered. 'They come regularly about once a week—one of those I delivered this morning had a Russian postmark.'

"'That will do,' said Lyle eagerly. 'Thank you, thank you very much.'

"He ran back into the hall and pulling out his penknife began to pick at the lock of the letter-box.

"'I have been supremely careless,' he said in great excitement. 'Twice before when people I wanted had flown from a house I have been able to follow them by putting a guard over their mail-box. These letters, which arrive regularly every week, can come but from one person. At least, we shall now know the name of the master of this house. Undoubtedly it is one of his letters that the man placed here this morning. We may make a most important discovery.'

"As he was talking he was picking at the lock with his knife, but he was so impatient to reach the letters that he pressed too heavily on the blade and it broke in his

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hand. I took a step backward, drove my heel into the lock, and burst it open. The lid flew back and we pressed forward, and each ran his hand down into the letter-box. For a moment we were both too startled to move.

"The box was empty.

"I do not know how long we stood staring stupidly at each other, but it was Lyle who was the first to recover. He seized me by the arm and pointed excitedly into the empty box.

"'Do you appreciate what that means?' he cried. 'It means that someone has been here ahead of us. Someone has entered this house not three hours before we came—since eleven o'clock this morning.'

"'It was the Russian servant!' I exclaimed.

"'The Russian servant has been under arrest at Scotland Yard,' Lyle cried. 'He could not have taken the letters. Lord Arthur has been in his cot at the hospital. That is his alibi. There is someone else, someone we do not suspect, and that someone is the murderer!

"'He came back here either to obtain those letters because he knew they would convict him, or to remove something he had left here at the time of the murder, something incriminating—the weapon, perhaps, or some personal article; a cigarette case, a handkerchief with his monogram upon it, or a pair of gloves. Whatever it was it must have been damning evidence against him to have made him take so desperate a chance.'

"'How do we know,' I whispered, 'that he is not hidden here now?'

"'No, I'll swear he is not,' Lyle answered. 'I may have bungled in some things, but I have searched this house thoroughly. Nevertheless,' he added, 'we must go over it again, from cellar to roof. We have the real clue now, and we must forget the others and work only on it.'

"As he spoke he began again to search the drawing-room, turning over even the books on the tables and the music on the piano.

"'Whoever the man is,' he said over his shoulder, 'we know that he has a key to the front door and a key to the letter-box. That shows us he is either an inmate of the house or that he comes here when he wishes. The Russian says that he was the only servant in the house. Certainly we have found no evidence to show that any other servant slept here. There could be but one other person who would possess a key to the house and the letter-box—and he lives in Saint Petersburg. At the time of the murder he was two thousand miles away.'

"Lyle interrupted himself suddenly with a sharp cry and turned upon me with his eyes flashing. 'But was he?' he cried. 'Was he? How do we know that last night he was not in London, in this very

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house when Zichy and Chetney met?'

"He stood staring at me without seeing me, muttering, and arguing with himself.

"'Don't speak to me,' he cried, as I ventured to interrupt him. 'I can see it now. It is all plain. It was not the servant, but his master, the Russian himself, and it was he who came back for the letters! He came back for them because he knew they would convict him. We must find them. We must have those letters. If we find the one with the Russian postmark, we shall have found the murderer.'

"He spoke like a madman, and as he spoke he ran around the room with one hand held out in front of him as you have seen a mind-reader at a theatre seeking for something hidden in the stalls. He pulled the old letters from the writing-desk and ran them over as swiftly as a gambler deals out cards; he dropped on his knees before the fireplace and dragged out the dead coals with his bare fingers, and then with a low, worried cry, like a hound on a scent, he ran back to the wastepaper basket and lifting the papers from it shook them out upon the floor.

"Instantly he gave a shout of triumph and separating a number of torn pieces from the others, held them up before me.

"'Look!' he cried. 'Do you see? Here are five letters, torn across in two places. The Russian did not stop to read them, for, as you see, he has left them still sealed. I have been wrong. He did not return for the letters. He could not have known their value. He must have returned for some other reason and as he was leaving, saw the letter-box, and taking out the letters held them together—so—and tore them twice across, and then, as the fire had gone out, tossed them into this basket. Look!' he cried, 'here in the upper corner of this piece is a Russian stamp. This is his own letter—unopened!'

"We examined the Russian stamp and found it had been cancelled in Saint Petersburg four days ago. The back of the envelope bore the postmark of the branch station in upper Sloane Street and was dated this morning. The envelope was of official blue paper and we had no difficulty in finding the two other parts of it.

"We drew the torn pieces of the letter from them and joined them together side by side. There were but two lines of writing, and this was the message: 'I leave Saint Petersburg on the night train and I shall see you at Trevor Terrace after dinner Monday evening.'

"'That was last night!' Lyle cried. 'He arrived twelve hours ahead of his letter—but it came in time—it came in time to hang him!'"

Sir Andrew struck the table.

"The name!" he demanded. "How was it signed? What was the man's name?"

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The young Solicitor rose to his feet and leaning forward, stretched out his arm.

"There was no name" he cried. "The letter was signed with only two initials. But engraved at the top of the sheet was the man's address. That address was 'THE AMERICAN EMBASSY, SAINT PETERSBURG, BUREAU OF THE NAVAL ATTACHE,' and the initials," he shouted, his voice rising into an exultant and bitter cry, "were those of the gentleman who sits opposite—the gentleman who told us that he was the first to find the murdered bodies—the Naval Attaché to Russia, Lieutenant Sears!"

A strained and awful hush followed the Solicitor's words, which seemed to vibrate like a twanging bowstring that had just hurled its bolt. Sir Andrew, pale and staring, drew away with an exclamation of repulsion. His eyes were fastened upon the Naval Attaché with fascinated horror. But the American emitted a sigh of great content and sank comfortably into the arms of his chair. He clapped his hands softly together.

"Capital!" he murmured. "I give you my word I never guessed what you were driving at. You fooled *me,* I'll be hanged if you didn't—you certainly fooled me."

The man with the pearl stud leaned forward with a nervous gesture. "Hush! be careful!" he whispered.

But at that instant, for the third time, a servant hastening through the room handed him a piece of paper which he scanned eagerly. The message on the paper read, "The light over the Commons is out. The House has risen."

The man with the black pearl gave a mighty shout and tossed the paper from him upon the table.

"Hurrah!" he cried. "The House is up! We've won!"

He caught up his glass and slapped the Naval Attaché violently upon the shoulder. He nodded joyously at him and at the Solicitor.

"Gentlemen, to you!" he cried; "my thanks and my congratulations!"

He drank deep from the glass and breathed forth a long sigh of relief.

"But I say," protested one of the men, shaking his finger violently at the Solicitor, "that story won't do. You didn't play fair—and—and you talked so fast I couldn't make out what it was all about. I'll bet you that evidence wouldn't hold in a court of law—you couldn't hang a cat on such evidence. Your story is tommyrot!"

In the joy of creation the story-tellers had forgotten their audience, until a sudden exclamation from Sir Andrew caused them to turn guiltily toward him. His face was knit with lines of anger, doubt, and amazement.

"What does this mean?" he cried. "Is this a jest, or are you mad? If

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you know this man is a murderer, why is he at large? Explain yourselves at once. What does it mean?"

The American, with first a glance at the others, rose and bowed courteously.

"I am not a murderer, Sir Andrew, believe me," he said; "you need not be alarmed. As a matter of fact, at this moment I am much more afraid of you than you could possibly be of me. I beg you please to be indulgent. We have been matching stories, that is all, pretending that we are people we are not, endeavoring to entertain you with better detective tales than, for instance, the last one you read, *The Great Rand Robbery.*"

The Baronet brushed his hand nervously across his forehead.

"Do you mean to tell me" he exclaimed, "that none of this has happened? That Lord Chetney is not dead, that his Solicitor did not find a letter of yours written from your post in Saint Petersburg, and that just now, when he charged you with murder, he was in jest?"

"I am really very sorry," said the American, "but you see, sir, he could not have found a letter written by me in Saint Petersburg because I have never been in Saint Petersburg. Until this week I have never been outside of my own country. I am not a naval officer. I am a writer of short stories. And tonight, when this gentleman told me that you were fond of detective stories, I thought it would be amusing to tell you one of my own—one I had just mapped out this afternoon."

"But Lord Chetney is a real person," interrupted the Baronet, "and he did go to Africa two years ago, and he was supposed to have died there, and his brother, Lord Arthur, has been the heir. And yesterday Chetney did return. I read it in the papers."

"So did I," assented the American soothingly, "and it struck me as being a very good plot for a story. I mean his unexpected return from the dead and the probable disappointment of the younger brother. So I decided that the younger brother had better murder the older one. The Princess Zichy I invented out of a clear sky. The fog I did not have to invent. Since last night I know all that there is to know about a London fog. I was lost in one for three hours."

The Baronet turned grimly upon the young Solicitor.

"And I suppose yours was a cock-and-bull story, too," he said. "Of course, it must have been since Lord Chetney is not dead. But don't tell me," he protested, "that you are not Chudleigh's son either."

"I'm sorry, said the youngest member, smiling in some embarrassment, "but my name is not Chudleigh. I assure you, though, that I know the family very well and that I am on very good terms with them."

"You should be!" exclaimed the

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Baronet, "and, judging from the liberties you take with the Chetneys, you had better be on very good terms with them, too."

The young man leaned back and glanced toward the servants at the far end of the room.

"It has been so long since I have been in the Club," he said, "that I doubt if even the waiters remember me. Perhaps Joseph may," he added. "Joseph!" he called, and at the word a servant stepped briskly forward.

The young man pointed to the stuffed head of a great lion which was suspended above the fireplace.

"Joseph," he said, "I want you to tell these gentlemen who shot that lion. Who presented it to the Grill?"

Joseph, unused to acting as master of ceremonies to members of the Club, shifted nervously from one foot to the other.

"Why, you—did," he stammered.

"Of course I did!" exclaimed the young man. "I mean, what is the name of the man who shot it? Tell the gentlemen who I am. They wouldn't believe me."

"Who you are, my lord?" said Joseph. "You are Lord Edam's son, the Earl of Chetney."

"You must admit," said the Earl of Chetney when the noise had died away, "that I couldn't remain dead while my younger brother was accused of murder. I had to so something. Family pride demanded it. Now, Arthur, as the younger brother, can't afford to be squeamish, but personally I should hate to have a brother of mine hanged for murder."

"You certainly showed no scruples against hanging me," said the American, "but in the face of your evidence I admit my guilt and I sentence myself to pay the full penalty of the law as we are made to pay it in my own country. The order of this court is," he announced, "that Joseph shall bring me a wine card and that I sign it for five bottles of the Club's best champagne."

"Oh, no!" protested the man with the pearl stud, "it is *not for you* to sign it. In my opinion it is Sir Andrew who should pay the costs. It is time you knew," he said, turning to that gentleman, "that unconsciously you have been the victim of what I may call a patriotic conspiracy. These stories have had a more serious purpose than merely to amuse. They have been told with the worthy object of detaining you from the House of Commons. I must explain to you that all through this evening I have had a servant watching in Trafalgar Square with instructions to bring me word as soon as the light over the House of Commons had ceased to burn. The light is now out and the object for which we plotted is attained."

The Baronet glanced keenly at the man with the black pearl and then quickly at his watch. The smile disappeared from his lips and his face was set.

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"And may I know," he asked icily, "what was the object of your plot?"

"A most worthy one," the other retorted. "Our object was to keep you from advocating the expenditure of many millions of the people's money upon more battleships. In a word, we have been working together to prevent you from passing the Navy Increase Bill."

Sir Andrew's face bloomed with brilliant color. His body shook with suppressed emotion.

"My dear sir!" he cried, "you should spend more time at the House and less at your Club. The Navy Bill was brought up on its third reading at eight o'clock this evening. I spoke for three hours in its favor. My only reason for wishing to return again to the House tonight was to sup on the terrace with my old friends, Admirals Burke and Simons; for my work at the House was completed five hours ago, when the Navy Increase Bill was passed by an overwhelming majority.

The Baronet rose and bowed, "I have to thank you sir," he said, "for a most interesting evening."

The American shoved the wine card which Joseph had given him toward the gentleman with the black pearl.

"You sign it," he said.

EDITORS' NOTE: We can't help calling your attention to Richard Harding Davis's brilliant technique as of more than half a century ago. First, he pointed suspicion at Lord Arthur Chetney, then at Princess Zichy, then in quick succession at the mysterious servant and the Russian house-owner—and still had at least two surprises left up his sleeve! Contemporary mystery writers could learn more than one lesson from the Old Master . . .

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While Mr. Holding is new to fiction he is not new to writing—he has had a successful nonfiction career. For 30 years he wrote advertising copy for the famous advertising agency, BBD&O. In January 1959, at the age of 50, "having accumulated a stake adequate to keep the wolf from the door," Mr. Holding retired as Vice-President of the BBD&O Pittsburgh office—to try his hand at writing fiction. Since (to quote him further) he has been an omnivorous reader of mystery stories for many years, and passionately devoted to the genre, his first attempts at creative writing have naturally been in this field—and "for obvious reasons, submitted first of all to EQMM."

We thank you, Mr. Holding, for many reasons—not the least of which is your opinion of EQMM; and now that you have cracked the ice, don't be a stranger!

THE TREASURE OF PACHACAMAC

by JAMES HOLDING

WHEN HE FOUND THAT HIS notebook was missing, Professor Felipe de la Vega knew they intended to do more than rob him. Before, he had suspected that they might steal his few personally owned antiquities and go away—back to Panama City, perhaps, where unscrupulous buyers for genuine but illegally exported pre-Columbian Peruvian artifacts undoubtedly lurked. But when he returned home from his morning archeology lectures at San Marcos University and saw that his thick black book of hand-written notes was gone—that's when he first seriously knew they meant to kill him.

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The Professor was a hook-nosed slender man, below medium height, with a dark brown skin and calm black eyes. He looked more Indian than Spanish, and maybe he was. For who could say, after all these generations, how well his ancestral Inca strain had withstood the weakening infusion of conquistador blood?

He stared at the empty space on the book shelf in his study where the notebook had been. He felt first surprised, then angry, then affronted, and finally, more powerfully than any of these, he felt a deep sense of shame for his cousin, Luis. After all, Luis was his only relative, the son of that Aunt Luisa, his father's sister, who had run away from Lima to marry the itinerant bullfighter many years ago. Had the bullfighter ever married Aunt Luisa? Perhaps not. But here was Luis, at all events.

Seeing that his notebook was gone, the Professor thought: this is unexpected, to say the least. And it was very clear to him that they were after far bigger game than he had first suspected. It was clear, too, that somewhere in the course of playing this game they would find it necessary to eliminate him.

They had arrived from Panama, they said, aboard a rusty, leaking tub that berthed in Callao Harbor. And at first, when they appeared at his little house in Lima, the Professor was quite glad to see them. It was just as darkness descended on the city and the illuminated cross atop Cerro San Christobal began to glow in the gloom. The professor made them welcome. He was pleased to have their company, for at best he was a lonely man.

The name Felipe de la Vega was widely known in scholarly circles. Was he not the holder of the Bolivar Chair in Inca Studies at the University? Was he not, at thirty-five, already the nation's outstanding authority on Peruvian history, which really meant Peruvian archeology? Yes, true. But though he had a thousand academic acquaintances, he had no close friends. Even the students to whom he delivered his lectures at San Marcos thought him unfriendly, deceived perhaps by the remote, brooding set of his dark features. He had no wife, no family. In consequence, a visit from his cousin and a friend of his cousin introduced variety into the Professor's austere life.

Certainly the two visitors were different from the Professor. One was his cousin, Luis, and the other was a man his cousin called Ramón, a large, quiet man with small, sharp eyes and almost no lips at all. He spoke a heavily accented Spanish in short bursts like machine-gun fire, and treated Luis as though he were nothing but a puddle of muddy water to spit in.

The man Ramón wore an American-made suit of light blue cloth, with a double-breasted jacket which he seemed reluctant to shed,

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even in Lima's baking heat. His breath smelled as though he had some decayed teeth.

The Professor insisted that they stay with him, eagerly offering them his spare bedroom. They accepted with alacrity, dropped their cheap fiber suitcases there, and proceeded to make themselves at home in the Professor's house.

"Ah, Felipe," Luis said, "it is good to be here with you. It is so calm here. So peaceful. So safe."

"And I am extremely glad to see you, Luis," Professor de la Vega said sincerely. He did not know what to say to the man called Ramón.

Ramón was looking about the room, the Professor's study, in which they sat. It was lined on one side with books, but was mainly remarkable for the untidy collection of Peruvian antiquities which crowded it. Book shelves, table tops, even the walls held mementos of various important digs the Professor had supervised. There were Nasca and Mochica vases, Cat-God figurines from the Chavín culture, molded black-ware pottery of the Chimú Empire, weavings from the Paracas peninsula, polychrome eating plates of the Inca, copper surgical instruments, animal statuettes, a star-pointed stone warclub. Ramón looked at them carefully with his small sharp eyes.

"What's all that junk?" he said finally. "Worth anything?"

"It is not junk," the Professor said politely. "It is on such articles as these, dug from our earth, that the whole body of Peruvian history is based." He thought perhaps he should deliver to Ramón the first lecture in his Peruvian History course.

"I mean money," Ramón said. "Is it worth anything?"

"Yes," the Professor said. "Undoubtedly. But these objects mean more to me than money."

Luis said eagerly to Ramón, "Cousin Felipe is a famous archeologist. The antiquities in this room alone are worth thousands of sols de oro."

Ramón looked at Luis, his eyes suddenly bright. "Thousands?" he asked in his staccato fashion.

"This is museum stuff," Luis said. "Very valuable. The University lets Felipe keep an item or so from each of his discoveries. Just as a souvenir. You know?"

"This is worth money to museums? This junk?"

"Yes," Luis said.

All right, Professor de la Vega thought. Let it be that way. No use trying to tell the man called Ramón about Peruvian history.

But he was wrong, as it turned out. For Luis said to Ramón, "Cousin Felipe has been working for years, trying to trace one particular batch of antiquities. An enormous treasure."

"Treasure?" The word semed the only one that Ramón understood.

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"Assuredly." Luis paused. Ramón sucked on his almost invisible lips. Luis went on, "My cousin, Felipe, knows more about it than anyone in Peru." There was a quality of family pride in Luis' statement. At least, that's what the professor took it to be. Luis said to him in a wheedling voice, "Come on, Cousin, tell Ramón about the Treasure of Pachacamac."

The Professor, whose spirits had been somewhat dampened by his guests' commercial viewpoint on antiquities, nevertheless revived quickly at Luis' invitation to tell of Pachacamac. His eyes kindled. He had suddenly the look of a man who is about to discuss the dream of his lifetime, as indeed he was. "Are you sure your friend is interested in Pachacamac?" he asked in a last flicker of courtesy to Ramón.

Ramón answered for himself. "Certainly. Tell me."

The Professor took a deep breath. "Well," he began, "when the Spaniards under Pizarro came to Peru in 1532, and conquered it, the Indian monarch Atahualpa, who was the Lord-Inca, was captured and held for ransom at Cajamarca. His ransom was to be—surely you have heard the famous legend—? enough gold and silver to fill a room twenty-five feet long and fifteen feet wide as high as a mark on the walls that even a tall man could not reach."

"You're joking," Ramón said.

"No, no, it is true," Luis said. "Even I know that."

Ramón looked at Luis as though Luis were *taquia,* llama dung.

"They filled it not once but three times, that room," the Professor said proudly, feeling the tug of his Inca heritage. "In six months' time. Twice with silver, once with gold."

The man called Ramón was impressed.

The Professor went on, "Messengers were sent to all parts of the Lord-Inca's lands, requesting that gold and silver be collected to pay his ransom, and sent to Cajamarca at once. On such a treasure-gathering expedition, Hernando Pizarro, the brother of Francisco, the Conquerer himself, came to Pachacamac."

"Where's this Pachacamac?" Ramón interrupted.

"Twenty-five miles south of here," said the Professor. "Hernando Pizarro found Pachacamac running over with gold and silver. For it was an anciemt holy city, dedicated before our history began to Pachacamac, the fearsome Earth-God, the Creator-God. And the God Pachacamac, from an inner room in the citadel, delivered through his priests and his virgins many predictions and oracles to the people, and received great wealth from them in return. And when the Inca conquered the city, it became a center of Sun-God worship, with priests and virgins of the Sun to serve it, and its wealth increased many times over."

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"Get to the point," Ramón said impatiently.

"I am there," the Professor said with dignity. "Hernando Pizarro caused to be gathered together gold and silver to the extent of a hundred llama loads at Pachacamac, and started this great treasure train off towards Cajamarca under escort of several Inca chieftains."

"Where's Cajamarca?" Ramón asked.

"A hundred miles north of here," the Professor said.

"So what happened?"

"The treasure train started out from Pachacamac. At an unknown point in the journey the Inca chieftains in charge of the train received a message from Cajamarca by runner. The message stated that their monarch, the royal and divine prisoner Atahualpa, the Lord-Inca with ransom for whom their llamas were laden, had been treacherously strangled by the Spaniards." The Professor paused.

"Here's the best part, Ramón," Luis said. "Coming now."

"The Treasure of Pachacamac never reached Cajamarca," the Professor finished. "It disappeared from the Inca road and from history at that exact moment. No one knows what happened to it—to the chieftains, or the llamas, or the gold and silver."

"In the form of coin?" Ramón asked, with one of his machine-gun bursts. "Or in junk like this?" His eyes went around the study.

"Imagine," the Professor said reverently, caught up in his dream, "such artistic miracles as delicately modeled human figures of pure gold, many of them life-size. And images of llamas, fish, and birds, also in natural size, cast in pure, radiant silver, the metal called by the Incas 'tears of the Moon.' And imagine, too, if you can, the dazzling beauty of trees and plants and flowers, daintily mimicked in precious metal by the Inca goldsmiths!"

"What's the use?" Ramón said. "The stuff is gone."

Luis threw a curious look at his cousin Felipe, "Maybe not, Ramón," he said. "To find out what happened to the Treasure of Pachacamac is what the Professor has been trying to do for many years. And he has made good progress." Luis' voice turned sly. "He himself told me so."

The Professor started. "What are you saying, Luis?" he asked sharply. "You are wrong. Certainly I have been working on the problem of the Treasure's disappearance. What a glorious thing it would be for Peru to unearth those fabulous art objects and place them in our museums for all to see and take pride in! How thrilling to use them as the springboard from which to leap joyously into new realms of knowledge about our ancestors!" When aroused the Professor tended to express himself a trifle flamboyantly. "But after twelve years of

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studying old documents and of personal exploration inland from all points along the old Inca road, I still do not know where the Treasure of Pachacamac is to be found."

"Not exactly, perhaps," Luis said. "But you know where it is *not* to be found. You have narrowed down the possibilities, have you not? So you told me in your letters."

The man called Ramón was following this conversation closely.

My cousin, thought the Professor, may merely be proud of me and my work. It is true that I have eliminated many possibilities. And it is true that I have narrowed the area of search. He said aloud to Luis, "I have there—" he gestured towards his book shelves—"a whole book full of painfully accumulated notes which prove only one thing: where the Treasure is *not* to be found. All else is rank speculation."

"In your last letter to me, Cousin," Luis said smoothly, his eyes on Ramón, "you mentioned that you thought you were now quite close to the secret."

"I may indeed have said such a foolish thing, Luis. But it is man's nature to boast about a dream, and one must forgive him. After all, this is a dream I have held all my life—to discover for Peru the ancient Treasure of Pachacamac."

They left it then, but the Professor slept uneasily that night. He thought perhaps Luis was more like the bullfighter than like gentle Aunt Luisa. When he awoke once, in the night, he heard the rumble of voices from the spare bedroom, and smelled cigarette smoke.

In the morning he left them sleeping and went off to his morning classes at the University. It occurred to him that he might make inquiries at the police station about his two guests, who were too tense, and somehow too oddly assorted not to be running from something. But a cousin was a cousin, he thought—even Luis made a family relationship, the only one he had. So he delivered his lectures and went to his house for luncheon, avoiding the police station.

No one else was in the house. He stepped into his study to secure his before-luncheon cigar. It was then he saw that his notebook was missing from its place. The Professor was affronted. He felt that his dream of finding the lost treasure of Peru, of helping to increase his country's meager knowledge of its own past, had been tarnished and made cheap, somehow, by contact with the grasping avarice that so plainly motivated the man called Ramón—and also, yes, to his shame, his cousin Luis. The Professor felt a slow and ancient anger rising inside him.

He went out and climbed into his covered jeep, which stood at the curb before his house in the Plaza. The University supplied the jeep for him to use in his ar-

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cheological rambles along the waterless desolation of the Peruvian coastal desert. He put the car in gear and drove slowly down past the University, and around the square toward the new skyscraper, and as expected, he soon distinguished his two house guests, huddled obliviously on a bench under a tree, examining his black notebook with feverish eagerness. He did not stop, but continued around the Plaza to his own house again, parked the jeep as before, and went in. The anger in him now was hot and burning.

He prepared luncheon for them. But first, he descended to the tiny cellar of his house and rooted out two eight-inch images of Inca priests which he had bought once, long ago, to use in a lecture class. They were not genuine antiquities. They were replicas of two originals in the National Museum, done in cheap materials for the tourist trade.

He set them on a bench and sprayed them all over with aluminum paint from a pressure can, covering the dark, earthen surfaces with a film of shimmering silver. When the paint had dried for a few minutes, he carried the figures out to the jeep and deposited them in a burlap bag under the tarpaulin which covered his battered archeological tools in the back of the jeep. This burlap bag was a kind of exploring kit, containing food, water canteen, and a few utensils, always ready for use on any desert expedition.

When Luis and the man called Ramón returned from their conference on the bench across the Plaza, the Professor greeted them cheerfully. All through luncheon he was cheerful, talking with animation, but he could not draw his guests into conversation. They seemed distraught.

After they had eaten, he said to the man called Ramón, "Where did you go this morning?"

"For a walk," Ramón replied.

"Yes," said the Professor, "I can see you got very warm." He looked at the sweat stains on Ramón's blue jacket.

"This damnable sun can boil the brains in your head," Ramón said.

The Professor nodded. "Lima is hot in March, but they say that exercise can increase one's resistance to the heat."

"Exercise!" Ramón said bitterly. "It would kill me!"

"That is why I suggest it," the Professor said quietly.

Ramón's lips were not visible at all. His small sharp eyes turned cold. "What do you mean by that?" he said.

"Nothing, Ramón," Luis said quickly. "He was joking. Weren't you, Cousin Felipe?"

"No," the Professor said.

"I didn't think so," Ramón said. He rose from his chair, clenched his big fist, and moved quietly towards the Professor.

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"Wait," said the Professor, "how would you like to know where the Treasure of Pachacamac is?"

Ramón said nothing, but he stopped moving.

The Professor said, "You have stolen my notebook and read it. True?"

Luis said evenly, "We were just curious, Cousin. We glanced through your notebook, yes, but we meant no harm. You yourself said it would not reveal the secret of the Treasure's whereabouts."

"But you didn't quite believe me, did you?" the Professor went on. "Now, having read the notes, you think I lied. And now, for my part, I know that you and your friend are thieves and rascals."

The man called Ramón sneered. "You know a lot, don't you? But only one thing interests me. You know where to find that treasure. I know it. I feel it. I am sure. Because your notebook admits it, at the end. You have narrowed down the possibilities until there is only one left."

The Professor watched the big man calmly, his eyes glinting, waiting for the inevitable question. It came. "Where is Cunti-suyu, Professor?"

The Professor laughed. "Do you think that I, Dr. Felipe de Ayala de la Vega, with Inca blood running in my veins, would reveal where the treasure lies to such as you—even if I knew?" He went quickly towards the door that led from the dining room to his study. "I shall, instead, telephone the police and report two thieves in my house!"

The man called Ramón moved swiftly. The Professor was then privileged to see why he had not discarded his jacket, even in the heat. Ramón's hand dived under the double-breasted coat and came out holding a large revolver. "Wait, Professor," he said. The Professor halted at the door. Ramón regarded him a moment in silence. Luis made no move.

Finally, Ramón said harshly, "The hell with this. I'll shoot him now. We can find the place by ourselves."

Luis spoke urgently. "Don't shoot him yet, Ramón—we cannot find the place without him. Would he write the name in his book if it were a well-known place? No. It is probably a pile of crumbled bricks in the desert, known only to him. No. Ramón, we could not find it alone."

"It is near Pachacamac," Ramón insisted. "The notebook says so."

"Have you ever been into the desert?" Luis asked.

Ramón considered. Then with the gun still pointed at the Professor, he walked past him to the study and ripped the telephone wires out of the wall. "Let us not call the police. Please, Professor," he said, "por favor." It was an insult, the way he said it. Then he came over to the Professor and

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struck him expertly above the ear with the gun barrel. As blackness descended upon him, the Professor thought with wry amusement, I am like the Lord-Inca—held for ransom.

It was dark when the Professor came to his senses. A jolting told him he was in a moving vehicle. Of course. The jeep. He nodded his head, pleased that he had anticipated their actions accurately. But the nod made his head pound like a skin drum.

He was in the back of the jeep, half reclining on the hard seat, half sprawled on the tarpaulin that covered his tools and burlap kit bag. They must have slung him in like a sack of wheat, after dark, when no curious eyes around the Plaza near his house could have seen them. He felt a quick thrust of satisfaction when his questing hand told him that the tarpaulin and what it covered had not been disturbed.

Ramón was driving the jeep. Luis sat beside him. Ramón said, "You'd better know what you're talking about."

"I know, all right," Luis said, like a small boy boasting to a big one. "We're in Miraflores now—a suburb. We'll be on the coast highway in a few minutes, and then head for Pachacamac."

"So we'll head for Pachacamac. But where is Cunti-suyu?"

Luis faltered, "I don't know."

"We need the Indian," Ramón growled. The Professor realized with surprise that Ramón was referring to him. "Read me that last entry again," Ramón said.

Luis leaned forward under the dashboard light and read from the Professor's notebook: "'If it is to be my happy fate to discover for Peru the lost Treasure of Pachacamac, I shall not achieve it, it is now obvious, by further researches along the northern segment of the treasure train's projected route to Cajamarca. Rather, I am now convinced, must I pursue my search with greater diligence in Cunti-suyu, near Pachacamac.'"

The Professor smiled at the grandiose style of the notes. "That's it," he said aloud. "Cunti-suyu—near Pachacamac."

"Oh." There was relief in Ramón's voice as he swiveled his head on his thick neck to look at the Professor. "You're with us again, are you? Good thing. We need you. We're all going on an archeological expedition together." His spirits were rising by the moment. "Isn't that cozy?"

"Even a blind llama," said the Professor sententiously, "occasionally finds the path."

"So the first thing," Ramón said, "is tell me where Cunti-suyu is."

The Professor smiled. He did not tell them that Cunti-suyu was the Inca name by which the entire southwest quarter of the ancient Inca world was designated—a vast

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territory of mountains and desert littoral extending from Cuzco to the sea, and from modern Lima southward to the Chilean border. He said, "Cunti-suyu is a pile of Inca ruins in the desert between here and Pachacamac."

"I told you," Luis said.

"Shut up," Ramón said. Driving with one hand, he brought the revolver out from under his coat and lifted it so that the Professor, in the back seat, could see it. Jovially, he said, "So you tell me where to turn off, Indian. Right? To keep your health."

The Professor injected resignation into his voice. "I will tell you," he said.

They were now on the wide coastal highway. They bowled along in the jeep. To his right the Professor could dimly see white, curling breakers rolling in from the Pacific. Off to his left the Andes loomed out of the desert like parched bones.

At his direction they turned from the paved highway some miles farther on, pointing the jeep's nose gallantly into the desert and towards the distant mountains. There was no road. There were no trees. There was no brush or moss or lichen. There was nothing except a dry and stony desolation, lying forlorn in the starlight on all sides of them, from the sea to the towering cordilleras ahead.

The jeep jounced, and rolled and jolted. But it drilled steadily eastward over the shale-like rocks and sandy earth, trailing a cloud of dust behind it that was visible even in the darkness. The man called Ramón drove with care, and at a snail's pace, following a route the Professor pointed out to him.

At Ramón's request, and encouraged by another flourish of the gun, the Professor explained his reasoning to them as they bounced along. "To me it is logical," he said, "that when the Inca chieftains in charge of the treasure caravan received the message that their Lord-Inca was dead and had no more need of ransom, they turned off the route to Cajamarca immediately, and ran for concealment with all speed. Where could they run but into the desert? The sea was on one side of them, the desert on the other. And it is equally logical that they must direct their flight towards the nearest settlement, where they could find sympathetic countrymen willing to help them conceal themselves and the treasure from the Spaniards."

"Quite a trick," Ramón said, "to hide a hundred llamas."

"Easily done," said the Professor. "They would merely add them to the village's own herd. Like hiding leaves in a forest."

"And the treasure?"

"In the storehouse, perhaps, covered with grain. Or in the village cistern, under muddy water. They had to find a town, in any event. You agree?"

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"How the hell do I know?" Ramón said. "You're the expert."

Luis spoke to the Professor without shame. "You think Cunti-suyu might have been the town, Cousin Felipe?"

"Do not call me Cousin," the Professor said. "It offends me." He sighed. "How many scores of ruins have I investigated! And always, nothing. But yes, it is possible—it could have been Cunti-suyu."

He saw in his mind the "Cunti-suyu" he was taking them to—a nameless ruined village of the Incas, archeologically barren, that he had himself discovered and explored years ago. And the Professor thought acidly: what credulous fools these are! The greatest scholars of the world, including Felipe de Ayala de la Vega, have been searching in vain for the Treasure of Pachacamac for four hundred years and more—and these children think that they can find it in a single night!

"How far yet?" Ramón asked.

The Professor looked about him. The desert had merged into mountains. The jeep was laboring uphill, slipping and skidding in a dry streambed. The Professor estimated they had come twenty miles from the coastal highway. He recognized a mound of rocks. "We are there," he said. "Cunti-suyu lies at the head of this arroyo. Go forward another hundred yards, then stop."

When the jeep pulled to a halt, the high shapes of rocks and surging mountains, and the low shapes of crumbling walls, loomed around it. Luis and the man called Ramón alighted. It was very still. And no longer hot, but growing chilly.

Ramón left the headlights burning. In their glow he glanced at his watch. "Almost four," he said. "The sun will rise soon." He reached an arm into the back of the jeep and hauled the Professor out. "You stay with me, Indian," he said, grinning. "We don't want you withdrawing unexpectedly from the expedition."

He forced the Professor to sit beside him on a rock near the jeep, keeping a muscular hand on his arm. Luis sat on Ramón's other side and they waited for daylight.

After ten minutes of silence the Professor said, "It would be pleasant to have coffee."

Luis laughed nervously. "He wants coffee, Ramón. Did you hear him? Coffee!"

"Why not?" the Professor said. "Wouldn't you like some? To take away the dawn chill?"

"Shut up," Ramón said viciously. The Professor could tell that the idea of coffee appealed to him.

"I have coffee in the jeep," he said. "Shall I make some?"

Ramón looked closely at him. "Go ahead," he said. He released the Professor's arm, but pulled out the gun and trained it on him. "Go ahead and get it."

The Professor walked over to the jeep and lifted the burlap bag from

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under the tarpaulin. He then went back to the others. "Here it is," he said, and took coffee-making materials from the sack. He balanced the chipped coffee pot on two stones, set a lighted can of Sterno beneath it, poured in water from his canteen, then added coffee. While they waited for the water to boil, Ramón said suddenly, "What else is in that bag?"

"Food," the Professor said. He showed them several cans of peaches and tomatoes from the bag, and put them back. "And we are fortunate this bag was in the jeep. Without water and food, a man can die here in the desert country in a single day. Did you know that?"

They said nothing. When the coffee was ready, the Professor poured some into a plastic cup from the bag. "This is the only cup," he explained. "I shall try the coffee."

"No," Ramón said, "*I'll* try it." His arrogance extended even to priority in coffee drinking.

"As you like," the Professor said. He held the cup of hot liquid towards Ramón. Then he flipped it, with a shoveling motion, so that the scalding coffee flew from the cup into the face of Ramón, and some burning drops sailed beyond to splatter Luis.

Both men cried out. The Professor seized the burlap bag at his side and leaped away in the darkness. Ramón's gun cracked—a sound of intolerable loudness above the desert. He is impulsive, thought the Professor who had heard the song of the passing bullet close to his ear—he will soon realize how foolish it is to shoot me. And in truth, the gun did not speak again.

As he ran, turning sharply to the right around a squat upthrust of rock, the Professor groped in the burlap sack and found the two Inca images he had placed there. Was it only thirteen hours ago? Scrambling and dodging among loose shale and shards of ancient masonry, he could hear someone running after him. He came to a large, box-shaped rock that might once have served as an altar or an anvil.

He recognized it, crouched behind it, scooped up a handful of dust from the ground, and rubbed it thickly on the silver-painted images. Then he disposed of them by tossing them, one at a time, into a blackness that yawned below him.

When he let himself he caught a minute later, feigning a turned ankle, it was Luis who shouted triumphantly to the man called Ramón, "I have him! He is here, Ramón! And he tried to take our food and water with him!" Luis spoke as indignantly as though the contents of the bag were truly his.

A rosy glow appeared above the mountains and objects began to take clear shape as night withdrew. Luis led the Professor back to the jeep, where Ramón still sat on his rock, a handkerchief held to his

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scalded face. Around the handkerchief his eye glared at the Professor. "Indian," he said tightly, although sucking on his lips with pain, "that was good coffee."

Apologetically, the Professor said, "I would have withdrawn from your expedition successfully, but I turned my ankle."

"A pity," Ramón said. The gun was still in his hand. He pointed it towards the Professor. "Tell me, Indian," he said, "where, in this village of Cunti-suyu, was the storehouse of grain? And where, also, the cistern?" His small sharp eyes regarded the Professor coldly.

"I will show you," the Professor said.

"You will tell me," said the big man.

"Very well. Look for the storehouse below. That way." He pointed. "The cistern should be above us. That way. Let us go."

"Thank you, Indian." Ramón smiled around his crumpled handkerchief. "Your ankle pains you?"

"Not greatly, no."

"You can walk on it without difficulty now?"

"Certainly."

"See how far you can walk on this," the man called Ramón said. He placed the muzzle of the gun against the calf of the Professor's right leg and pulled the trigger.

For an instant Professor de la Vega felt nothing. Then he knew agony, his senses blurred, and he thought he might faint. He fell to the ground. The wetness of fast-flowing blood soaked his trouser leg in a twinkling.

Ramón laughed and put away the gun. He said to Luis, in good humor, "Now, if we want him again, we have him. He is hitched to the ground." He wiped his coffee-burned eye and restored the handkerchief to his pocket.

They went away and left him. The Professor was dimly conscious of it through his pain. In the swelling light of daybreak they walked down the dry streambed. The fools.

Lying beside the jeep, the Professor saw that his abandoned coffee pot was within reach of his right hand. He fought down arising nausea, struggled to a sitting position, and dumped the still warm coffee grounds from the pot into his hand. Then he raised the cloth of his trousers from his wound and watched, for a moment, the blood welling from the small blue mouth in his leg.

Inca blood, he thought lightheadedly, looks like any other. It did not seem to him that the bullet had harmed the bone of his leg, drilling merely through the muscles of his calf. But the bleeding was bad.

In a fog of pain he placed the coffee grounds on the wound, forcing them into the hole the bullet had made when it entered his calf, and stopping the exit-hole. If coffee grounds can halt the bleeding of machete cuts, he thought, perhaps

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they will do the same for bullet holes; and the grounds must be almost sterile, having just been boiled. He tied his handkerchief tightly about the wound to keep the coffee grounds in place. Then he drew down his blood-soaked trouser leg to hide the bandage, and lay back on the ground.

He heard the man called Luis talking with Ramón as they returned—or was it his cousin Luis talking with the man called Ramón? He was confused. But he knew they had found nothing—not even an old storehouse.

When they paused near his recumbent body, the Professor pretended unconsciousness. Through his eyelashes he saw Ramón look down at him. Ramón had lost his lips again and his face was black with anger. He drew back a foot and kicked the Professor heavily in the side.

"Wake up, Indian," he said, "we shall need you soon, I think." They went off together then towards the cistern, which they now believed would prove to be as non-existent as the storehouse.

The Professor lay still, trying to hold his straying senses together. His leg throbbed; but he felt no more blood dripping from it. Above him, in the deep hot sky over the mountains, wheeled a large black bird. He smiled a little at that, and thought, not yet—you must be patient, bird. He gathered his strength.

Suddenly a shouting began, off to his right. His smile broadened, and his cheekbones caught a new highlight from the upward hastening sun. For he knew what the shouting meant, almost as though he had been there to see. Luis and Ramón had found the cistern. And they had seen the heart-stopping flash of Inca "silver" in the dusty rubble of the cistern floor.

In a moment running footsteps approached him. He heard Luis crooning like a madman as he scrabbled in the back of the jeep. "We have found it! It is ours! The Treasure has revealed itself! Where, in the name of God, is a rope?"

Heedlessly, he tossed the Professor's tools out of the jeep, some of them falling on the Professor's inert body. Soon he found a coil of rope and ran frantically off again, carrying the rope and—the Professor noted with amusement—a long-handled shovel.

Painfully, then, the moment Luis was out of sight, Professor de la Vega raised himself to his feet, using the rusty crowbar that had fallen across his chest as a staff. Once up, he stood for an instant, breathed deeply, and rested some weight on his injured leg. And although his dark skin paled to gray, and waves of weakness assailed him, he knew he would be able to bear the pain. Now, at last, he thought, I shall humble myself no more to the man called Ramón; and Luis, my cousin, must share

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with him the punishment. There is no other way.

He limped as quietly as he could in the direction Luis had taken. The crowbar was under his armpit, now, a serviceable crutch. He had not far to go. When he came in sight of the altar rock which stood on the lip of the cistern, he saw that Luis had tied the rope around the rock and that the rope's free end, by which they had made their descent into the pit, trailed downward into the cistern. Two voices, shrill with excitement, came up to him.

The Professor now abandoned caution. He stumped to the altar rock, ignoring stoically the agony in his leg. Standing behind the rock, he reached around it and quietly took the trailing rope in his hand. He jerked it once, savagely, and it came arcing up from the cistern to collapse like a long, backbroken serpent on the ground beside him. Then he stepped from behind the rock and looked down into the cistern, an impressive relic of the ancient irrigation system that once had been the lifeblood of this arid Indian marca.

The reservoir was thirty feet deep. Its steep, smooth walls were unclimbable and formed of monolithic blocks of stone so cunningly shaped and fitted by the Incas long ago that the mortarless joints between them would admit not even a knife-blade. And standing upon the rubble of centuries at the cistern's bottom were Luis and the man called Ramón, each with a small, aluminum-painted image in his hand. They stood motionless, their heads lifted towards him, as still as images themselves, arrested by the Professor's voice above them.

"Have you found the Treasure of Pachacamac?" the Professor said, leaning on his crowbar.

They looked up blankly, stupidly, at the spot where their rope had hung and now hung no longer—their only avenue of escape from this smooth-walled prison, contrived for storing water half a millenium ago.

"Those images are tourist bait," the Professor said. "Not worth a dozen sols. I painted them—and planted them—myself."

He saw understanding rock them like a blow. Ramón reacted first—his hand dived for his gun in the hidden holster, but when he got it out and fired, the Professor stood safe behind the altar rock on the cistern's rim.

His face made gaunt by pain, and the anger in him again, the Professor said, "You called me Indian, Ramón. I *am* Indian. And proud to be. And I therefore leave you to the mercies of the Indian's ancient god, the sun."

"Wait, Cousin," Luis called out frantically. "We are trapped here, without the rope. We cannot get out. We will die!"

"It is possible," the Professor said politely.

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"You'll die, too," Ramón said. "I have the keys to the jeep and you cannot walk to Lima."

"But I have food and the water canteen," the Professor replied. "Especially, the water canteen. These are good to have, don't you agree? And besides, I keep a spare set of keys to the jeep in my supply sack."

The man called Ramón was silent. He stared at the rock behind which the Professor was sheltered, then grimly down at the gun in his hand.

"You may welcome that before long," the Professor remarked.

Luis dropped the false silver statue on the ground and held up his hands towards the Professor. "I did not want to harm you, Cousin," he said. "It was the Treasure. All your life you have searched for it. And I believed from your letters you had found it."

"Of course, Luis," the Professor said. "It was the Treasure of Pachacamac. And see what a thoughtful cousin I am. I leave you with this treasure. Perhaps all you need to win it is to dig with the shovel. The Treasure could be there beneath your feet—as well as anywhere."

"Yes," said Luis in a hopeless and frightened tone.

"Professor de la Vega," said the man called Ramón, "you are a man of principle. You are not without scruples. You have taught us the lesson you wished to teach us. Now let us out."

"No. I am an Indian, remember. And it is well-known that Indians have a deep sense of justice. Guard the Treasure for me until my return, will you?"

"You aren't truly going to leave us here?" Luis pleaded.

"I have no choice, Luis. I must get this leg of mine to a doctor. And I must report to the authorities without delay. The police are very strict with men who plot to steal Peru's antiquities, you know."

"Please, Cousin," Luis said, sobbing now. "We do not want the Treasure of Pachacamac."

"Ah," the Professor said. "You are undoubtedly telling me the truth at last." He paused. "I shall return tomorrow evening—or perhaps the evening after tomorrow. With the police. Meanwhile, you may pass the time quite pleasantly—digging for the Treasure of Pachacamac."

"Professor," said the man called Ramón, "if you are truly leaving us here, permit us to have a little of the water in the canteen." There was no longer any arrogance in his voice.

"No," said the Professor. "I shall need the water myself. Did I tell you I was wounded? I may have fever. But while I am away, perhaps it will rain and you will be refreshed that way."

"Rain?" queried Ramon with a flicker of hope.

"Yes," said the Professor. "Rain. We need it very badly. Do you

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realize that not a drop of rain has fallen here on the desert littoral for fifteen years?" He laughed. "I am going now. Goodbye. The sun will soon be high and will drink up the shade in your cistern."

"No, no!" Luis screamed. "Do not leave us to die in the sun!"

"You will die," said the Professor politely, "but you will not be alone." He looked upward to the mountain peaks and saw the large black bird still circling in the deep sky.

Then Professor de la Vega set the crowbar under his arm and turned away. Behind him, in the Inca cistern, the two men were suddenly quiet as they felt the heat of the day begin.

NEXT MONTH . . .

Another All-star issue

★★★★★

HUGH PENTECOST's	*Waterfront Shakedown*
MARGERY ALLINGHAM's	*Family Affair*
PHILIP MacDONALD's	*In the Course of Justice*
JAMES HILTON's	*The Perfect Plan*
GERALD KERSH's	*The Thief Who Played Dead*

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The second exploit of teenage 'tec, Wally the Watchful Eye

Wally and the Three-Dollar Bill

by PAUL W. FAIRMAN

The Wacthful Eye Detective School
Parker Building
New York, New York

Mr. Walter A. Watts
Lettyville, New York
Dear Mr. Watts:

As President of Watchful Eye, I take a great deal of pleasure in personally contacting our outstanding pupils from time to time in order to learn how they are getting on. As you were certainly one of these, I'd like to hear from you—a short note on some of your successes that have resulted from our Correspondence Course. Also, if I can be of any personal service to you, please don't hesitate to call on me.

Cordially,
John Hayden, President

Dear Johnny:

Thanks for your letter and I guess I *am* one of your outstanding pupils even though I'm a modest guy and the thought didn't occur to me until you brought it up. I can't give you all the credit though, Johnny, because let's face it, the course let me down in a few spots. Like in Lesson Number Five—*How To Approach the Scene of a Crime.*

Of course I'm not blaming you for Sheriff Smiley Keenan. He's a natural nuisance and it's not your fault he thinks your Correspondence Course is for the birds and isn't happy unless he's sniping at "that grocery store Sherlock," which he calls me because I work in the Lettyville Market. But I have to work there for a while because I can't get a private op's license until I'm 21 and that won't be for three years yet.

So old Smiley is my pet problem, Johnny, not yours. But still Lesson Number Five has got a big booboo in it. It should say something about dogs. I found that out when I approached the scene of old Senator Carlin's murder—I never did actually make it—and got the seat torn out of my new checked slacks.

You see, practically everybody has a dog these days and so a detective is

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clashing with canines on every corner. He can't concentrate on crime or even get in the same neighborhood with it from being pestered by pups.

So add a little something in Lesson Number Five about taming temperish terriers. And in exchange for this timely tip—so you won't feel obligated—I'm going to let you pay the enclosed bill for $3.00. That's what old Tom Adams, our local tailor, charged me for patching my pants.

All the best,
Wally

The Watchful Eye Detective School
Parker Building
New York, New York

Dear Walter:

I'm afraid you took my letter too literally. To be perfectly frank, it wasn't my idea but a suggestion of our publicity man. He thought it might bring a few authentic endorsements for our Correspondence Course and I thought so too. Now I'm beginning to wonder.

Anyhow, I'm returning the $3.00 bill as there is nothing wrong with Lesson Number Five and we certainly cannot assume the personal expenses of an alumnus, however distinguished.

Sincerely,
John Hayden, President

P.S. By the way, who is Senator Carlin? I never heard of him.

Dear Johnny:

I knew you'd ask that question, being a professional op at heart. Old Rufus Carlin wasn't really a Senator at all but he ran for the State House so often that the Lettyville people got into the habit of calling him Senator. Besides, he was loaded with loot that they say he plucked out of politics even though the voters vetoed him every chance they got.

But anyhow, a couple of days before your first letter came, the Senator got himself murdered real good, which caused a sensation here in Lettyville (pop. 3,000).

When I got the news, the first thing I had to do of course was reach the scene of the crime—no snap with Sheriff Smiley Keenan in charge. So I put some beans and buns into a delivery basket and headed out on my bike, figuring old Smiley might chase a private op but he couldn't stop the grocery boy.

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The Senator's place is a big twenty-room bat roost in the middle of a twenty-acre estate about two miles out of town. It's got a ten-foot brick wall clear around it with iron spikes on top because the Senator had a thing about prowlers. He was always afraid someone would sneak in and kill him—which he was able to predict better than his own elections because that was just what happened. He was stabbed in his study—right smack through the heart—with a gold-plated paper knife.

I didn't have any trouble with old Smiley because he wasn't there. A State Patrol car was parked at the big iron gates and the trooper let me through with a wave of his true detective magazine. I pedaled up the drive and around to the back door and that's where the incident of the dog happened.

He was tied up when I got there—just at the edge of the steps—and believe me, here was a dog! Half police and half Baskerville, it had been trained to tear up anything or anybody that wandered onto the place including elephants.

And just by looking at him you knew this king-sized pooch loved his work. He was busy chewing through his rope as I went by. I said hello, nice pup, and he called me something in dog language and I went inside to see Susanna Bates, a sweet old lady who cooked and kept house for old Rufus and worked herself down to the bone in general.

We get along together fine, so I asked her for the lowdown and she cracked her knuckles and gave it to me. The Senator had been killed sometime around midnight, the coroner said. The Senator's nephew, Gerald, had found him that morning, colder than a frozen grouse, with the paper knife sticking out of his chest.

That was all she could think of so I asked some keen, perceptive questions like, "Who was here last night?"

She said, "Why, just Miss Helen and Mr. Willy and Gerald and I—and the Senator, God rest his soul."

Miss Helen is Gerald's sister. They were old Rufus' grandchildren, in their early twenties, and they lived with him. Willy was a brother, a pathetic old geezer who stuck around because he'd have starved to death anywhere else. All three of them were sponging off Senator Carlin's generosity which wasn't much bigger than a midget's monocle, but they got by on it.

"Who else?" I asked in a kind but firm voice while I kept one eye out for old Smiley.

"Nobody—nobody at all."

"How do you know for sure?"

"Because the Senator, may he rest in peace, always kept the dog tied up

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if he was having visitors but he told me to turn him loose at eight o'clock. You know the beast is specially trained to keep prowlers off. He wouldn't have let a living soul come near the place." Suzy stopped to shudder. "Many's the night he's awakened me with his barking even when an animal strayed too close to the wall."

"And he didn't bark last night?"

"There wasn't a sound out of him."

"Then the case looks pretty simple."

"Wally, what are you saying? That one of *us* killed poor Senator Carlin? That's not true. None of us are murderers." She looked at me, confused. "And if you're meaning suicide, the coroner said that was impossible. There weren't any fingerprints on the knife and the Senator, bless his departed soul, didn't wear gloves."

I hadn't meant that at all. I knew old Rufus wasn't the suicide type just as none of the four people under suspicion could kill anybody. They'd all been in the market at one time or another and I liked every one of them.

But I ran out of time just then because I heard boots clumping down the hall and they sounded like old Smiley's number twelves, so I took off.

The State Trooper was gone when I pedaled toward the gate and it looked like a smooth exit. But that man-eating monster had chewed through his rope and came streaking after me. We got to the gate in a photo finish and that's when I left a piece of my checked slacks in towser's teeth.

So now that you know the facts, Johnny old pal, I'm sure you'll want to pay for fixing my pants. I'm re-enclosing the $3.00 bill.

Yours for justice and fair play,
Wally

121 Sixth Avenue
New York City

Dear Wally:

I'm writing this from home because it hardly comes under office business, but I do want to give you a few tips on the Carlin murder case.

You are making the cardinal error of letting personal opinion cloud your mind and warp your judgment—refusing to see clearly because the suspects are all people you know personally.

You must face the cold fact that with the dog allowing no intruders, the murderer *must* be one of the four: the niece, the nephew, the brother, or the housekeeper.

Sheriff Keenan is no doubt viewing the case from an equally biased posi-

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tion—no doubt as hazy on its merits as he is on the excellence of The Watchful Eye Detective School.

So you have a rare opportunity, by using the methods we taught you, of discovering the guilty party and showing up the Sheriff for the blundering incompetent he is. I would suggest concentrating on Uncle Willy as my instincts point unerringly in his direction.

Yours for untiring effort,
Johnny

P.S. I'm returning your ridiculous $3.00 bill. Please don't bother me with it again.

Dear Johnny:

You're right about old Smiley being a blundering bloodhound but in this case he thinks the same way you do. He had Uncle Willy slated for the hot seat himself until I got the case solved. It didn't take long and now everybody's happy except the killer and the Senator.

Remembering what you wrote in Lesson Number Nine about perseverance, I'm sending you the $3.00 bill again.

Yours with determination,
Wally

121 Sixth Avenue
New York City

Dear Wally:

All right. So I was wrong about Uncle Willy. It happens to the best of detectives sometimes. Which of the other three was it?

In suspense,
Johnny

Dear Johnny:

None of them. I told you they weren't killers, so I didn't waste time the way Old Smiley did. I just went around asking one simple question. And when I got the answer to that simple question I went out to see a guy who had a farm about four miles out of Lettyville. A guy named Pete Haney. He broke down and confessed and the State Trooper I took with me hauled him in.

He did some very important work for the Senator and he claims the Senator agreed to pay him more than the old boy came through with.

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So Haney got a little drunk one night and brooded about it and went out to have a showdown with old Rufus. He didn't go there to kill him but that was how it ended. He wasn't the killer type either, but he'll go to the chair anyway. Too bad because he wasn't a bad guy at all.

Yours for deductive detection,
Wally

121 Sixth Avenue
New York City

Dear Wally:

Your letter received and I'm proud of you. But what was the simple question you asked that enabled you to put the finger on Haney? Not important, of course, but I *am* a little curious.

Yours for complete frankness,
Johnny

Dear Johnny:

Let's call that the $3.00 question.

All the best,
Wally

121 Sixth Avenue
New York City

Dear Wally:

All right, you blackmailer, enclosed find my personal check for $3.00.

I'm waiting,
Johnny

Dear Johnny:

A very simple question—*Who trained Senator Carlin's dog?* A dog like that never forgets his teacher.

But I don't have to draw you a diagram, Johnny old pal. After all, you wrote the Course.

All the best,
Walter A. Watts
(the A is for Alert)

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **ROBERT ARTHUR**

TITLE: ***Larceny and Old Lace***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVES: Grace and Florence Usher

LOCALE: Milwaukee

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *The Usher sisters, 70 and 72, had read more than 1000 mystery books. They knew the technique of every famous detective in fiction. So, obviously, they were equipped to handle any criminal situation . . .*

A CROSSING BELL CLANGED. HEADlights of waiting automobiles glinted into the coach car. The train began to slow down. Grace Usher looked up from her book.

"We must be coming into the Milwaukee station," she said. "High time, too. It's nine p.m. We're four hours late."

"Mr. Bingham will be wondering what happened to us," Florence Usher agreed. She straightened her black jacket and tidied her hair. Florence prided herself on her youthfulness—she was 70, two years younger than Grace.

"Anyway," Grace said with satisfaction, "it gave me a chance to finish both John Dickson Carr's and Ellery Queen's latest. My, they were exciting! I do love a good mystery."

"I must read them next." Florence made a note in a small red notebook which she carried in a voluminous leather purse almost big enough to be a brief case. "Did you ring for the porter, Grace?"

"And have to tip him a dime? Nonsense! We can carry our luggage quite well by ourselves."

"But I thought he would help us find a taxi and tell us how to get to Mr. Bingham's office."

"Florence, please don't be provincial. After all, Milwaukee is only a city. And though we've never been in a large city before, we know a great deal about every large city in the world. Why, my goodness, we

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each have read more than a thousand mystery novels, haven't we? We know about London from Agatha Christie and Margery Allingham, about Miami from Brett Halliday, about Chicago from Craig Rice, about Paris, San Francisco, New York—"

"Yes," Florence interrupted, "it's true we know a great deal about life from reading so many mysteries—but just the same—"

"Just the same fiddlesticks! I consider we are fully equipped to meet almost any situation, all due to the liberal education we have acquired through reading mysteries," Grace said. "Now we had better get off this train. Mr. Bingham will be waiting for us—at least, I hope so."

Mr. Bingham was. He had been waiting for several hours, consoling himself from frequent nips from a bottle in his dingy office, whose glass door bore the legend *E. Bingham—Attorney at Law—Real Estate and Insurance.* Now he was chewing mints as he poured tea for Grace and Florence Usher. The tea had been brewed over a hot plate whose sole prior use had been for brewing coffee strong enough to help him over a night-before.

"How thoughtful of you!" Grace said, sipping her tea. "Nothing like a nice cup of tea to refresh one after a long train trip. We broke down, you know, fifty miles west."

"I was worrying about you, dear ladies," Bingham assured them, slipping another mint into his mouth. He showed yellow teeth in a smile the effect of which was spoiled by his large nose and his small eyes, set too close together. "I feared you had decided not to come to claim your little inheritance."

"We have burned our bridges behind us," Florence assured him. "When we received your letter informing us that our nephew Walter had left us his house and furnishings, we sold the lending library we had run since we retired from schoolteaching, said goodbye to everyone, and came to stay."

"You see—" Grace's bonnet nodded as she leaned forward—"for seventy years we have lived in a small town. And now we are anxious for broader horizons."

A bit of mint lodged in Bingham's long, scrawny throat.

"Quite so. Kaff—kaff—quite so. Er—I thought that as soon as you sold your nephew's house you would return to Kiskishaw and—"

"Heavens, no!" Grace told him. "We want to *live,* Mr. Bingham! We are going to transform Walter's house into a boarding house for writers and artists."

"We'll meet such fascinating, creative people," Florence chimed in. "The talk at the dining table will be like music to our poor, starved ears."

Mr. Bingham set down his teacup, went over to the bottle, turned his back, and poured himself more than just a nip.

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"Really," he said, his tone hollow, 'I advise you to sell. The house is run down, taxes are high, the neighborhood unsavoury—"

But Grace merely shook her head.

"We will cope," she said. "Now please tell us something about poor Walter. After all, we haven't seen him in the last twenty-five years."

"How did he die?" Florence asked, pressing her gloved hands together in eager interest.

"Well—" Mr. Bingham rubbed his high forehead distractedly—"he died of a form of heart failure—"

"I suppose," Grace agreed, "that you could call three bullets in the heart a form of heart failure. However—"

"*Two* bullets in the heart," Florence corrected. "The coroner's report said the other missed by several inches. You see, Mr. Bingham, we read all about it in the Milwaukee paper before your letter arrived. We follow all the crime news. Of course, we didn't know then it was our nephew who had been killed. We weren't very much surprised to find out, though. We always felt Walter would come to a bad end."

"As a boy he used to torment puppies," Grace added. "And he was expelled from three colleges, like his father."

"Our brother Henry, you know. He disappeared years ago." Florence sipped her tea daintily. "We suspected he was in the penitentiary. But if he was he didn't use his own name. Henry always did have family pride."

Mr. Bingham, having finished another medicinal snort, wiped his lips with a handkerchief that was not quite clean.

"Of course," he said. "Well, Walter called himself Walter Smith, and until I found a memorandum among his papers directing his property be left to you I did not know his real name, or that he had any relatives.

"He was—ah—well, to be frank, a man of mystery. His source of income was not—ah, known. His house is a large one on the edge of town, but how he acquired it no one knows. One night last month he was entering his home about midnight when he was shot to death on his own doorstep by a mysterious assailant. The police have been unable to catch the killer or even find a motive."

"I'm sure whoever did it had a very good reason," Grace said, patting her lips fastidiously. "When Walter was young we often wanted to kill him ourselves."

Mr. Bingham mopped his brow.

"Er, yes, of course," he said. By now he was having difficulty focusing on the two little old ladies, bright as crickets for all their sober, small-town dresses, their old-fashioned bonnets, and gray hair.

"But again, dear ladies, let me urge you to sell your nephew's house. It is really in a shady neighborhood—tainted by a murder—and

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I have a purchaser who wants to tear it down and build a gas station—"

"No. We intend to live there and run a boarding house for intellectuals," Grace told him firmly. "Now, Mr. Bingham, please let us have the key and the address and a taxi will take us there."

Mr. Bingham, who had once had an iron-willed aunt, produced the key and wrote down an address.

"There," he croaked unhappily. "I do hope you have a—ah—a peaceful night. I do hope so."

"Why shouldn't we?" Grace asked. "Come, Florence, I'm all eagerness to see our inheritance. I've been thinking of a name for it. Do you suppose we dare call it The House of Usher?"

They rustled out. From the window Mr. Bingham saw them lift their umbrellas and hail a taxi. He groaned, poured another drink, and went down the gloomy hall to another door on which he knocked timidly, then entered.

Inside, a large man in a discreetly tailored suit lounged in a leather chair, smoking a cigar. The room was furnished with a great deal more elegance than Bingham's and the door bore the legend *Gordon Enterprises, Inc.*

Harry Gordon blew a smoke ring as Bingham entered.

"Well, Ed, how much did the house cost me?"

Bingham mopped his brow again. "They won't sell, Harry."

"Won't sell?" The big man brought his feet down solidly on the floor. "Maybe you didn't persuade them right."

"They're going to open a boarding house called The House of Usher."

Bingham lowered himself into a chair.

"They're tired of hick towns," he sighed. "They want to reside in a metropolis like Milwaukee and live the life artistic. They're two little old ladies and they have whims of steel."

"You told them about their nephew being bumped off."

"Yes. I told him the place had a sinister reputation, their nephew was a man of mystery—all that stuff."

"You didn't tell them he was the smartest blackmailer who ever put the bite on Harry Gordon?"

"Of course not."

Harry Gordon scowled. "I wish I knew where the devil he hid those ledger sheets he lifted," he said. "They've got to be in that house some place—he wouldn't have trusted them very far from him. But three times we've been over that dump and still we can't find them. Damn it, if they ever got into the hands of the special prosecutor —"

He clamped his teeth down on his cigar. Bingham used his none too clean handkerchief for another face-mopping job.

"If we couldn't find the papers

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they'll stay hid. Those two old bats will get tired of that gloomy morgue soon, then we'll be able to buy it cheap and tear it down. There's nothing to worry about."

"Maybe we should rough them up a little."

"No, no, nothing like that! That would really start the cops boiling. Newspapers and the public always go for little old ladies like that. They remind everybody of somebody's mother."

"Anyway, they'll get a scare that may send them chasing," the big man grunted. "I sent Tiny to the house tonight for another look around. If they bump into him they may decide to sell, and sell fast. Tiny isn't the kind of guy two little old ladies would care to meet in a dark old house late at night!"

"Well," Florence Usher said doubtfully, "it *is* a big house, isn't it? And awfully dark."

"All houses are dark until the lights are lit," Grace informed her. "Let's go inside and put on some lights."

They picked up their suitcases and went up the flagstoned walk that led from a dimly lit street to the old, brown, somehow sinister house that sat back amid scraggly trees. A shutter creaked and Florence gave a little gasp.

"Please, Florence," Grace said, "control yourself. Every mystery story is full of sound effects like creaking shutters. They mean nothing except that some hinge needs a little oil. Give me the key and we'll go in."

Florence handed her the key. Grace inserted it into a very modern lock in a very heavy front door, and the door opened. This time there were no creaks. They stepped into a hall and fumbled until Florence found a light switch. The overhead light snapped on.

"Well!" Grace said approvingly. "Very nice furnishings. Walter was certainly getting money from some source, though I doubt if he was earning it . . . Florence, what *is* it?"

"I heard a noise," Florence said in a strained whisper. "There's someone upstairs."

"You must not let your imagination . . . There *is* someone upstairs." Grace lowered her voice. "It must be a burglar—someone who knew the house was empty and took the opportunity to search it."

"Let's leave at once," Florence whispered between trembling lips. "Let's send the police and—and spend the night at a hotel."

"Don't be a chicken, Florence! After all, we know all about the technique of trapping burglars—it's thoroughly explained in many mystery novels. Remember your Arsène Lupin and Raffies. Besides, it is well known that burglars abhor violence—every criminal sticks to his trade, and burglars burgle. Follow my orders and we will teach Mr. Burglar a thing or two!"

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"I—I'd rather not," Florence objected, but Grace was already tiptoeing toward the stairs. She removed her shoes, motioned to her sister to do the same, and in stockinged feet, only their skirts whispering, the two slowly climbed the stairs.

As they reached the second floor the sound of someone moving about became louder. The sound came from behind a closed door near the head of the stairs. Grace and Florence tiptoed toward the door. Grace looked confident and Florence looked unhappy.

"No noise. Let me peek through the keyhole." Grace bent and put her eye to the old-fashioned keyhole. Inside a light was on. A short, heavy-set man with a face like a dish of scrambled eggs was tapping the walls with his knuckles. Tiny Tinker had been a heavyweight prizefighter, but not a good one.

"There's a man in there looking for something," Grace reported. 'We must get him to come out."

"I don't *want* him to come out!" Florence wailed. "Please, let's *go*."

Grace ignored the plea.

"After reading all those mysteries we certainly know how to handle this," she retorted. "Practically all of them agree that the heel of a woman's shoe makes a splendid weapon. As we wear Dr. Borden's Sensible Shoes, with extra heavy heels, I'm sure we're well equipped. Now I'll stand on one side of the door, you stand on the other. We'll each hold a shoe in our right hand. Then I'll toss my other shoe down the stairs—"

A moment later Tiny Tinker, inside the room, heard a clattering noise. "Rats," he muttered to himself and went on rapping the walls. But the noise was repeated a few moments later (when Florence, after some urging, threw her left shoe down the stairs. Tiny, never a great brain, decided the time had come to investigate. He opened the door and stuck his head out, blinking into the darkness.

"Whazzat?" he asked. Then all the knockouts he had ever suffered came back to haunt him. Even a skull like his was not made to withstand the impact of two heels on Dr. Borden's Sensible Shoes.

Tiny went down for the count.

"Well, we're making progress," Grace Usher said determinedly.

She looked down at Tiny Tinker, who lay on the floor of the room. They had been able to drag him in but not to lift him onto the couch. So they had stretched him out and with a lot of brightly colored neckties from a rack beside the door they had lashed his legs to the couch and his hands, stretched up over his head, to a handsome cherrywood desk. Snoring on the floor, Tiny Tinker looked like a cannibal's Thanksgiving dinner ready for the pot.

"*Now* can we call the police?" Florence asked.

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"Certainly not. Take a look at this burglar. See how well dressed he is. He's no ordinary burglar." (He wasn't. Tiny was Harry Gordon's bodyguard.)

"What of it? He's so ugly it makes me nervous to look at him."

"Florence, I am very disappointed in you." Grace surveyed her sister disapprovingly. "After all these years we've talked about living life and having adventures, and now that we're really doing it you keep wanting to call the police. I *really—*"

The phone, which sat on the desk, rang. It rang again. Grace started toward it.

"But Grace—"

"Maybe it's for us."

"Who would be phoning us? Really, Grace—"

But Grace picked up the phone. "Hello?" she said pleasantly. Then she covered the mouthpiece. "It *is* for us! It's Mr. Bingham!

"Yes, Mr. Bingham?" she said into the mouthpiece. At the other end Mr. Bingham sounded as if he might be breathing hard. He asked if they were all right—if everything was quiet—he just managed to refrain from asking if they had heard any unusual sounds.

Beside him, Harry Gordon was chewing a cigar and growling in his ear, "Damn it, Tiny just has to be there! They must have bumped into him by now."

While Florence listened in disbelief, Grace assured Mr. Bingham that everything was quiet, the house seemed lovely, and thank you for being so thoughtful. She hung up, leaving Mr. Bingham and Harry Gordon staring at each other with disbelief.

"Damn it," Gordon swore again, "maybe Tiny left before they got there. We'll give him half an hour to check in. Then we'll go over there and see what gives."

In Nephew Walter's house of mystery, Florence and Grace were also staring at each other.

"Grace, how could you tell such lies? He could have brought the police and taken away this—this criminal on the floor."

"But we don't *want* him taken away." Grace summoned all her patience. "We have to question him first."

"Question him about what?"

"About Walter's death and what this man is looking for—something Walter must have hidden. My goodness, don't you see? This is a real mystery! We're plunged right into the middle of it. It's a chance we never dreamed we'd have."

"What in the world are you talking about?"

"I mean this is our chance to solve a mystery, like all those amateur detectives we've read about."

"But hardly any of them were women," Florence pointed out.

"Stuart Palmer's Hildegarde Withers is a woman. Also, she is a schoolteacher. I see no reason we shouldn't be able to do anything

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he could. We'll start by searching his room."

"Well, all right," Florence agreed, faint flush in her cheeks at the excitement of the chase. "But first we must scan the room for possible places of hiding."

Together they scanned the room. It was a sort of library-den, with Walter's bedroom beyond. It was furnished expensively—the cherry-wood desk, several new easy chairs, a shelf of books, all mysteries, hand-blocked wall paper, an Oriental rug. On the desk was an expensive pen and blotter set—which had been ripped apart—and two framed photos. One of them was of a busty young lady wearing a scanty costume. Across it was tenderly inscribed *To Walty with love from Peaches*. The other one brought a tender expression to Florence's face.

"Look," she said. "The picture of you and me with Walter when he finally managed to graduate from high school twenty-five years ago. I confess I've always felt a little guilty about giving him a passing grade in Civics."

"As things turned out, he certainly didn't deserve it," Grace agreed, studying the faded photo of themselves, with Walter, a head taller, standing between them. Walter had had a rather narrow face, with a rather thin mouth and sharp eyes set closely together. He had had fine wavy hair, however. "I'd forgotten how close together Walter's eyes were. But we were quite good-looking, then. Yes, and our figures were hardly inferior to that of this—this female with whom Walter seems to have been so friendly."

"Please, Grace!" Florence cast a scandalized glance down at Tiny Tinker, who was groaning softly on the floor. "It isn't like you to be indelicate with a strange man in the room. Anyway, it proves there was some good in Walter. He did remember us even after all these years. And he thought enough of us to leave us his house. Perhaps we always thought too harshly of him."

"Perhaps," Grace said, her features softening. "In spite of his mischief he always did seem fond of us. But back to business—this room has already been searched. The desk has been ransacked, the chairs examined, the rug taken up, the couch almost turned inside out—the work obviously of this individual on the floor. Perhaps we should make him tell us just what he is looking for."

Together they looked down at Tiny Tinker. His face twitched with the pain of approaching consciousness.

"Florence," Grace remarked thoughtfully, "I wonder if this man killed Walter and now has come back to the scene of the crime to look for something he couldn't find at the time?"

"Killed Walter?" Florence jumped a little. "Then he's not just a burglar—he's a murderer. Grace, we *must* call the police!"

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"Did you ever read a detective story where the police solved the case?"

"Well—"

"Of course not. Therefore it's up to us. We must see justice done for dear Walter, even if he was a crook of some kind. This creature is regaining consciousness. We'll question him."

Tiny Tinker opened one eye and looked up at them blearily.

Florence shuddered. "What makes you think he'll answer our questions?" she asked.

'Surely one thousand mystery novels have taught us the correct procedure as to how to question a gangster! We can't be polite about it. If brutality is called for, we'll have to be brutal."

"You've never hurt a fly in your life," Florence retorted. "How can you start being cruel now?"

Grace ignored the question. "Sssh! He's opening his other eye."

Tiny Tinker blinked painfully up at them.

"What hit me?" he asked.

"We hit you, young man," Grace told him. "We slugged you with the heels of our Dr. Borden's Sensible Shoes. Now we have your hands and feet tied securely so you cannot take it on the lam, or make a getaway."

Tiny Tinker yanked his arms and legs, found the facts as stated, and looked up at them with a tinge of awe on his scrambled features.

"The Usher sisters," he announced. "That's who you dame must be!"

"We find your knowledge of our identity very suspicious," Florence told him, bolder now that she saw the neckties were going to hold.

"Say, you two better untie me," Tiny Tinker said menacingly. "I you know what's good for you Harry will be looking for me."

"Florence," Grace instructed "make a note that this person is employed by someone named Harry."

'Certainly." Florence found paper and pencil in the desk and jotted down *Emply by smne nma Harry*. A trace of alarm appeared on their captive's face.

"I didn't say nothing!" he protested. "What're you two up to, anyway?"

"It's quite simple," Grace said "You killed our nephew Walter—"

The alarm on Tiny Tinker's face grew astoundingly. "How'd you know that? I mean I didn't neither, you're crazy."

"Aha!" Grace turned a look of triumph on her sister. 'We *are* making progress. This man admits he killed poor Walter."

"I don't!" Tiny shouted. "Nothing of the kind. I didn't kill him and I didn't admit nothing. If you know what's good for you, you'll untie me double quick. You're messing in something that's a lot too big for you."

"Aha!" Grace chortled. "Florence, make a note. The prisoner ad-

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mits he is part of a large criminal conspiracy."

"Yes, Grace." Florence made a note.

Tiny writhed harder. "I didn't! I didn't admit no such thing! What're you two trying to pin on me, anyway?"

"We are simply solving a crime in the accepted manner—just as we have learned it from more than one thousand mystery novels," Grace told him. "Now young man, who's the Big Brain?"

"Who's the what?"

"The Big Brain. Mr. Big . . . Oh, whom do you work for, stupid?"

"I work for Harry Gordon and don't call me stupid. Who can tell what you two dames are talking about?"

"Florence, make a note. Prisoner identifies the master mind of the criminal conspiracy as one Harry Gordon."

"Wait a minute, wait a minute!" Tiny almost wept from sheer frustration. "I didn't never say no such thing."

"*Two* double negatives in one sentence!" Florence exclaimed. "Where did you go to school?"

"Where did I go to school?" Tiny blinked. "What's that got to do with it?" Tiny could hold out against a team of expert detectives for 48 hours, but the methods of the Usher sisters confused him.

"Never mind," Grace said loftily. "Now let us sum up. You have admitted you killed our nephew Walter, that you work for one Harry Gordon, that he is head of a vast criminal enterprise, and presumably you were searching this house for something of Walter's which Harry Gordon wants. Now what is it? Dope? Hot ice? Stolen bonds? Plates for counterfeit money? You might as well tell us, for we'll get it out of you anyway."

Tiny stared up at two pairs of steel-gray eyes giving him the same looks that had made generations of schoolboys quail. He shuddered.

'Yeah," he gulped, "I guess you will. Okay, I'll talk. Because you can't do nothing about it, see. Harry Gordon has this town sewed up. So this is how it was—"

Tiny Tinker started talking, and Florence started taking notes. Tiny had his eye on the clock. If he could talk long enough, Harry would get there eventually. Harry would know how to take care of two sharp old witches like these, in their black taffeta and sweet-little-old-lady bonnets. Harry would probably put 'em on two broomsticks and fly 'em to the moon.

"So there we have the picture!" Grace said when at last Tiny had finished talking. "Walter was a bookkeeper for this Harry Gordon. Walter stole some records of Gordon's criminal activity. But instead of turning them over to the police, Walter hid them and blackmailed Gordon who got tired of paying

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and sent this—what is your name?"

"Just call me Tiny," Tiny sighed.

"Sent this Mr. Tiny to search the house. Walter came home too soon and Mr. Tiny shot him. Since then no one has been able to find the incriminating documents. They're still somewhere in the house."

"Which must be why Mr. Bingham tried to discourage us from coming here!" Florence exclaimed. "He's in it too!"

"And now we are on the point of smashing this criminal ring!" Grace breathed, her eyes shining. "What joy, Florence, what a triumph! Even Nero Wolfe would be proud of us. All we have to do is find those hidden papers, turn them over to the special prosecutor whom the governor has appointed, and Harry Gordon, Mr. Bingham, Mr. Tiny here, and many other nefarious individuals will be incarcerated."

"Huh?" Tiny wrinkled his brow. But Florence looked a little doubtful. "How can we hope to find the missing papers if they couldn't?" she asked. "I still say we should call in the police."

"Florence, you have a negative attitude. First we have to think the same way as Nephew Walter did. We must put ourselves in his place. Suppose *we* were blackmailers—where would *we* hide incriminating documents?"

"Well—" Florence knit her brows.

"How large are these documents?" Grace asked Tiny.

"Size of a ledger page. Walter got away with about twenty pages."

"Big enough to fill a brief case," Grace mused. "Now let me think—if I were Walter—"

"I think—" Florence began, but a voice from the door interrupted her and made both sisters whirl around with little eeeking sounds.

"Please go right ahead, ladies. But you don't mind if I come in?"

Harry Gordon advanced into the room, puffing on his cigar. Mr. Bingham danced nervously behind him. Harry Gordon came toward Grace and Florence like a truck about to crush two small gray kittens. He stopped and fixed them with a sardonic glance.

"Well, ladies, you've had a ball with my boy Tiny, haven't you? But the party's over now. This is the end of the line. Sit down in those two chairs until Ed and I get Tiny untied. Then we'll decide what to do with you!"

Tiny Tucker, released from the neckties, sat subdued in a corner. Harry Gordon sat back in one of the easy chairs and pointed his cigar at Grace and Florence, who were huddled on the sofa beyond the desk, subdued but still defiant, like two ruffled hens.

"They made Tiny talk," Gordon rumbled. "I say we ought to put them in cold storage."

"No, no, Harry," Mr. Bingham urged, nervously rubbing his forehead. "Please believe me, what they

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:now would never stand up in :ourt. And as I said before old adies like these are dynamite. 3ump 'em off and the newspapers vould jump right off the presses creaming. Every fix you have n would come unstuck. Believe me, Harry, whatever you do, don't ever ay a finger on a sweet little old ady."

"Then what do you suggest?" Harry glared broodingly at the sis:ers.

"Get them out of town and make ;ure they never come back."

"My way, they'd be sure never to :ome back."

"If you think you can intimidate us, you're very much mistaken!" Grace bristled. Florence turned on her furiously.

"He is not mistaken. He *has* intimidated us. Anyway, he's intimidated *me*. And I'm willing to make a bargain with him."

A flicker of interest showed in Harry Gordon's black eyes.

"What kind of a bargain, sister?"

"You want this house because it has certain papers hidden in it. All right, we'll sell you the house, just as it is, and you can find the papers for yourself."

"Go on."

"We'll take a trip around the world, leaving as soon as we have the money."

"Florence, I will not bargain with criminals!" Grace cried.

"Be quiet, Grace. You've been the boss up until now. Well, now I'm in charge. Mr. Gordon, how about it?"

"Pay 'em off and get rid of 'em," Bingham pleaded. "We'll find the papers if we have to tear the house down."

"I dunno." Harry Gordon puffed a cloud of smoke. "It'd be cheaper just to bury them."

"We wouldn't stay buried, do you hear?" Florence told him. "We'd—rise up and haunt you."

"I wouldn't be surprised if you did at that," Harry Gordon said. "All right, I'll give you ten thousand in cash for the house, and you leave town tonight."

"Fifteen!" Florence retorted.

"Why, this house is worth at least twenty thousand dollars!" Grace said in great indignation.

"You're in no position to bargain, lady," Harry Gordon said. "All right, fifteen thousand."

"In cash. And you drive us directly to the station," Florence stipulated.

"A deal. We'll pick up the cash at my office. Tiny!"

"Uh—yes, boss?"

"These old—these ladies didn't find those papers before I got here, did they?"

"No, boss. They haven't touched nothing—nothing but me, that is. They spent the whole time questioning me." Tiny rolled his eyes. "Lucky they ain't on the force."

"All right, let's go. Tiny, stay here. Don't leave this house until you find what I want. Or I'll call in

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the wreckers and tear it down to the foundations."

"Right, boss."

"Just one thing." Florence stood up. The set of her chin was determined. "We have nothing to read on the train. We prefer mysteries. We'd like to take two of Walter's books with us."

"Oh, you would, would you?" Harry Gordon's tone was silky. "Which two do you have in mind?"

"Those at the end of the shelf—the two green ones."

"Sure. Hand them over to me, Tiny." Gordon held the books in his hand while his eyes searched Florence's face. "You're smart, sister. You figure Walter microfilmed the papers and hid them in these books, huh? Ed, help me search the—" he looked at the titles—*"The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe, Volumes One and Two."*

He and Ed Bingham painstakingly demolished the two old books. They cut open the covers, slit the binding, riffled through the pages. Finally, looking peevish, Harry Gordon handed the wreckage of the two books to Florence. She opened her voluminous purse and dropped them inside.

"Come on, let's get going," Gordon growled. "I'm tired of you two and your ideas. I guess you did just want something to read. But if I thought you were playing games with me—" He glared at them, then led the way to the door. "Come on, there's a midnight train."

A crossing bell clanged. Head lights of waiting automobiles glinted into the coach car. The train began to pick up speed.

"Just midnight," Grace said, he tone discontented. "Florence, d you realize we were in Milwauke only three hours?"

"But my, they were excitin hours." Florence yawned. "Really we must go to bed. We need ou sleep."

"How can you expect to slee after having sold out to a gang o thugs and cutthroats? I certainl won't. Why, we've let Walter' murderers go free, and for just a few thousand dollars!"

"Walter was always a rapscallion," Florence answered. "I certainly did not intend to lose my life over him."

"Just the same, nothing like thi ever happened in *any* of the book we have read. I feel mortified."

"I don't think you should, Grace Remember, we have those tw books of Walter's, don't we?" Florence drew out the two volumes o Poe's Works and put them on he sister's lap.

"What good are they?" Grace objected. "The criminals searched these books thoroughly. They didn't find the papers or microfilms in them."

"Because they aren't there. Only the clue is there."

"What clue?"

"You said we must think like Walter. Well, we introduced him to

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oe as a boy, didn't we? We gave m these two volumes, in fact. hat he still kept them showed me : was still fond of Poe, and that ıve me the clue to his thinking."

"You're talking in riddles," race said fretfully.

"Not at all. In one of these vol-mes, *The Purloined Letter* comes ght after our favorite—and Wal-r's—*The Fall of the House of sher.*"

"Oh." Enlightenment began to ›read over Grace's face. "The ory about hiding the valuable ocument inside an old envelope ıat was left out in plain sight!"

"Exactly. So—" Florence reached eeper into her capacious purse and ulled out a framed photograph—ıe one which showed herself, race, and Walter. Less than an our before it had stood on Wal-:r's desk.

"Walter had as much sentiment s a rattlesnake," she said. "Why ıould he keep a picture of himself /ith us? Only because a picture of ourself and two maiden aunts is bout as unsuspicious as anything an be. Nobody gave it a second hought."

"But how did you get it?" Grace sked. "I didn't see you take it."

"In the confusion when Mr. Gor-on and Mr. Bingham were bend-ng over to untie Mr. Tiny, I just lipped it into my purse. Now if my nalysis is correct, all we have to do s open it up and inside, in back of ur picture, we shall find micro-films of the documents which will send Mr. Harry Gordon and all the others to the state penitentiary. Now, Grace, let us look."

The micro-films were there.

"Ellery Queen would be proud of you," Grace said, for she was never one to deny credit where credit was due. "Hercule Poirot would be proud of you. Perry Mason and Lord Peter Wimsey would be proud of you. The Mystery Writers of America would be proud of you, for Edgar Allan Poe is their patron saint."

"Thank you," Florence said, smiling shyly. "In New York we must plan to attend one of their monthly meetings. I feel sure we will be eligible to join as associate members. After that we will take the boat—"

"What boat?" Grace demanded.

Florence looked suprised.

"Why, the boat to London, of course! We have fifteen thousand dollars, so we are going to take a trip around the world—and our first stop will be London.

"London!" Grace sat erect. "The London of Sir Henry Merrivale and Albert Campion! The London of Scotland Yard! Who knows what adventures we may encounter on the foggy London streets? We may be able to help Scotland Yard bring to justice a criminal who would otherwise evade its clutches!"

Her eyes focused on a distant unseen spot. Her voice became dreamy. "Perhaps we can even rent a furnished room on Baker Street!"

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ALDRICH, ROBERT S.: The Day of the Boar ..... April 75
ARMSTRONG, CHARLOTTE: St. Patrick's Day in the Morning . April 112
ARTHUR, ROBERT: Larceny and Old Lace ..... June 116
ASHBAUGH, DICK: The Hope Chest Jan. 13
BARR, STEPHEN: Cui Bono ..... June 56
BIGGLE, JR., LLOYD: Grandfather and the Gentle Swindler .. Feb. 55
BOUCHER, ANTHONY: Best Mysteries of the Month ..... Jan.-June
CARLETON, MARJORIE: The Voice of the Heart ..... Feb. 117
CARR, A. H. Z.: Man Who Understood Women ..... Jan. 62
CARR, JOHN DICKSON: The Silver Curtain ..... April 99
CHRISTIE, AGATHA: Seek, and Ye Shall Find ..... Jan. 112
Blunt's Brilliant Detectives ... April 40
The Kidnaped Prime Minister . June 12
CRANE, FRANCES: Death in Guatemala ..... June 73
DANIELS, NORMAN: Two Sides to Everything ..... March 13
Act of Friendship ..... May 13
Something Has To Break .... June 27
DAVIS, RICHARD HARDING: In the Fog, Part I ..... April 28
In the Fog, Part II ..... May 91
In the Fog, Part III ..... June 79
ELKIN, SAMUEL: Survival of the Fittest ..... Jan. 73
ELLIN, STANLEY: Beidenbauer's Flea ..... Feb. 5
The Seven Deadly Virtues .... June 5
FAIRMAN, PAUL W.: Wally the Watchful Eye ..... March 122
Wally and the Three-Dollar Bill June 110
FERRARS, E. X.: Playing with Fire Jan. 98
The Case of the Auction Catalogue ..... March 95
FISH, ROBERT L.: The Adventure of the Ascot Tie ..... Feb. 82
The Adventure of the Printer's, Inc. ..... May 51
FITZGERALD, F. SCOTT: The Mystery of the Raymond Mortgage March 66
FRAZEE, STEVE: All Legal and Proper ..... March 79
GARDNER, ERLE STANLEY: The Case of the Murderer's Bride March 143
GASKILL, GORDON: Murder on Skis Feb. 27
GILBERT, MICHAEL: A Case for Gourmets ..... Feb.
The Terror of Pardoe Street .. April
GILLIES, JACQUES: Mission Accomplished ..... Feb. 1
GORDON, RICHARD M.: The Demise of Uncle Willie ..... March
George and the Dragon ..... May
HAWKINS, JOHN & WARD: Little Boy Missing ..... May
HOLDEN, WILLIAM: The Clue of the Strange Chords ..... May
HOLDING, JAMES: The Treasure of Pachacamac ..... June
KAUFMAN, LENARD: Coup de Grace Jan. 1
KING, RUFUS: The Bluebird Persuaders ..... May 1
LEWIS, HERBERT CLYDE: It Won't Be News Tomorrow ..... Jan.
LOCKRIDGE, FRANCES & RICHARD: If They Give Him Time ... Feb.
Cat of Dreams ..... May 1
LONDON, JACK: The Madness of John Harned ..... April
LUPIEN, WES: The Best of Friends Jan.
MARQUAND, JOHN P.: Goodbye, Piccadilly ..... March
MATHIESON, THEODORE: Omar Khayyam, Detective ..... Feb.
Stanley and Livingstone, Detectives ..... April
MILLER, WADE: The Memorial Hour ..... March 1
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Far, Far Better Thing ..... March
The Bottomless Pit ..... May
POST, MELVILLE DAVISSON: The Instrument of Darkness ..... June
PROCTER, MAURICE: The Million Dollar Mystery ..... Jan.
ROTH, HOLLY: The Six Mistakes . June
ROY, JUNE MCMAHAN: A Visit from Brother Thomas ..... April
RUBIN, RICK: A Gift for Antonietta ..... March
The Man Who Hated Editors . May
SCHERF, MARGARET: The Man Who Liked Roquefort ..... March
STURGEON, THEODORE & WARD, DON: Man Who Figured Everything ..... Jan.
WARD, DON & STURGEON, THEODORE: Man Who Figured Everything ..... Jan.

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